

Section One

The Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention and the Origin of the Women's Rights Movement

Summary

Held in the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls, New York, on July 19–20, 1848, the Seneca Falls convention was both the first woman's rights convention in the United States and the beginning of the organized woman's rights movement. The architectural resources of Women's Rights National Historical Park tell the story of this unique, nationally significant event: what caused it, who organized and attended it, and why it happened when and where it did.

The Seneca Falls convention transformed a wide variety of ideas about woman's rights (expressed earlier through abolitionism, legal reform, moral reform, and popular culture) into an identifiable woman's rights movement. It did so in two key ways:

1. Seneca Falls set the model for conventions as the major organizing force for the woman's rights movement. After Seneca Falls, regional and state conventions met in Rochester, New York, in August 1848, and Salem, Ohio, in April 1850, before the first national convention gathered in Worcester, Massachusetts, in October 1850, initiating regular conventions that lasted into the twentieth century.

2. The Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments, patterned after the American Declaration of Independence, asserted that "all men and women are created equal" and captured the nation's attention by linking woman's rights directly to the founding ideals of the United States. It set the agenda (including demands for women's equality in politics, law, work, education, religion, family life, and moral authority) and outlined methods (including hiring lecturers, circulating tracts, signing petitions, enlisting help from churches and newspapers, and holding conventions) that dominated the woman's movement for generations.

Americans immediately recognized the Seneca Falls convention as a pivotal event for woman's rights. In 1848, newspaper editors across the country characterized Seneca Falls on the one hand as a second "flag of independence" and on the other hand as "a dreadful revolt." Beginning in the 1850s, woman's rights advocates consistently called Seneca Falls the first woman's rights convention. From 1850 to 1858, participants in six state and national conventions referred explicitly to Seneca Falls as the first woman's rights convention. They also called Salem, Ohio, the first state woman's rights convention, and Worcester, Massachusetts, the first national woman's rights convention.

In 1858, Elizabeth Cady Stanton herself began publicly to tell the story of Seneca Falls. Beginning in the 1870s, that story (incorporated in the *History of Woman Suffrage* in 1881 and in Stanton's autobiographical accounts in the 1890s) became the basis of regular anniversary celebrations of the Seneca Falls convention held by woman's rights organizations themselves: first by the National Woman Suffrage Association (a group dominated by suffragists sympathetic to Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, in opposition to the American Woman Suffrage Association), then by the unified National American Woman Suffrage Association, and finally by the National Woman's Party.

After most of the first generation of suffragists died in the early 1900s, later generations continued to reiterate the significance of the Seneca Falls convention. When the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution finally gave women the right to vote in 1920, historians began to write the history of the early movement, primarily through biographies of

suffragists. From 1920 to 1959, three basic interpretations of Seneca Falls appeared: (1) Biographers of Stanton and Susan B. Anthony followed the basic account outlined by Elizabeth Cady Stanton; (2) Alice Stone Blackwell, in a biography of her mother Lucy Stone, also recognized Seneca Falls as the first woman's rights convention but focused on the tension between Blackwell's parents (Henry Brown Blackwell and Lucy Stone) and Stanton and Anthony; (3) Historian Mary Beard represented a very different third perspective. While Beard affirmed that Seneca Falls was the first convention, she downplayed the importance of the entire woman's rights movement. Woman, argued Beard, had always been a "force in history," and the idea of their second-class citizenship, highlighted at Seneca Falls, was not an accurate reflection of their real role in economic and social life. Beard's perspective did not dominate later histories, however. Capping the tradition of activist-historians, Eleanor Flexner, in her remarkable *Century of Struggle* (1959), returned to Elizabeth Cady Stanton's story of the Seneca Falls convention. With sensitivity to issues of race and class as well as sex, Flexner emphasized once more the importance of Seneca Falls as the beginning of the organized woman's rights movement.

With the revival of feminism in the 1960s (often called the "second wave" of the women's movement), historians began to revisit the early woman's movement. Like earlier scholars, most historians in this period highlighted Seneca Falls as the first woman's rights convention. Few of them, however, actually looked at Seneca Falls using primary documents. Of those who did, Ross Evans Paulson in 1973 was the first to rely on sources other than Stanton or the Stanton family. Stanton's own story of Seneca Falls emphasized woman's rights as "the greatest rebellion the world has ever seen." This view was so pervasive, noted Paulson, that it had become a "legend." In contrast, Paulson (contrasting French and American feminists) argued that signers of the Declaration of Sentiments had a liberal rather than a radical agenda. Their goal was to join the dominant culture rather than challenge it.¹

Like many legends, however, Stanton's story was not a fabrication but a simplified version of a much more complex tale. Beginning in the 1970s, scholars began to fill in the story. Two major biographies of Stanton, one by Lois Banner (1980) and a second by Elisabeth Griffith (1984), looked again at Seneca Falls from Stanton's perspective, emphasizing the uniqueness of Seneca Falls as the site of the first woman's rights convention. Timothy Terpstra studied press reactions to Seneca Falls and found, contrary to Stanton's emphasis on negative editorial comments, that about one-third of U.S. newspapers viewed the Seneca Falls convention positively.²

In 2004, Judith Wellman published *The Road to Seneca Falls: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the First Woman's Rights Convention*, the first book-length study of the convention. Wellman looked at Stanton, the convention, and the people who signed the Declaration of Sentiments in the context of social and community history. She argued that, inspired by a small group of Quakers, Stanton was the catalyst for bringing together two main groups of people at the Seneca Falls convention. The first group was composed of political antislavery advocates in Seneca Falls, associated with the new Free Soil Party. The second group were Quakers allied with the American Anti-Slavery Society. In 1848, this group helped organize the reform-minded Congregational Friends. In the context of legal reformers, who promoted passage of the New York State Married Woman's Property Act in April 1848, both Free Soil

¹ Ross Evans Paulson, *Women's Suffrage and Prohibition: A Comparative Study of Equality and Social Control* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman, 1973); Katherine Milton, "The Signers of Seneca Falls" (independent study paper for Ross Evans Paulson, Augustana College, April 1970).

² Lois Banner, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton: A Radical for Woman's Rights* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980); Elisabeth Griffith, *In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Timothy Terpstra, "The 1848 Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Convention: Initial American Public Reaction" (master's thesis, Mississippi State University, 1975).

advocates and reform Quakers came together in Seneca Falls on July 19-20 to support the nation's first convention for woman's rights.³

Beginning in the 1990s, a handful of scholars downplayed the importance of the Seneca Falls convention, emphasizing instead the importance of Lucy Stone and conventions in Salem, Ohio (1850) and Worcester, Massachusetts (1850). John McClymer argued that the Worcester convention was far more important than Seneca Falls. Nancy Isenberg emphasized the importance of the convention in Salem, Ohio, for its relationship to the Ohio constitutional convention. Looking at the life of Lucy Stone and at Ohio and New England in the early movement, Andrea Moore Kerr and Joelle Million, biographers of Lucy Stone, deemphasized the importance of Stanton and Seneca Falls. While Worcester, Salem, and Lucy Stone were certainly key parts of the story, none of them replaced Seneca Falls as the first woman's rights convention, and none of these authors actually studied Seneca Falls or its impact.⁴

In *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Womens Rights Movement*, Sally G. McMillen coordinated much of this literature. Building her story around the lives of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony, and Lucy Stone, she argued that the Seneca Falls convention was a pivotal event in U.S. history. It "changed the way American society (and much of the Western world) thought about and treated women in the mid-nineteenth century. It unleashed a complicated, lengthy struggle that continues to this day."⁵

In the late twentieth century, historians who studied the woman's movement as a whole, rather than focusing only on the Seneca Falls convention, suggested that woman's rights had many roots. The more places they looked for ideas about woman's rights, the more they found. The result was a new emphasis on the multiple sources of woman's rights sentiments before 1848. Lori Ginzberg, for example, delineated the local roots of woman's rights in Jefferson County, New York, studying six women who sent a petition to the New York State Constitutional Convention in 1846. Historians such as Karen Offen, Bonnie Anderson, and Nancy Hewitt viewed Seneca Falls from an international perspective, arguing that the ideas expressed at Seneca Falls were part of a larger revolutionary outpouring in 1848, related especially to French revolutionary feminism.⁶

From this perspective, the Seneca Falls convention was significant precisely because ideas about woman's rights were widespread, nationally and internationally, before 1848. The Seneca Falls convention acted as a catalyst, a nucleating agent, turning unfocused ideas into an organized woman's rights movement. Before Seneca Falls, people discussed woman's

³ Judith Wellman, *The Road to Seneca Falls: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Beginning of the Women's Rights Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

⁴ John F. McClymer, *This High and Holy Moment: The First National Woman's Rights Convention, Worcester, 1850* (Fort Worth, Texas: Harcourt Brace, 1999); Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Andrea Moore Kerr, *Lucy Stone: Speaking Out for Equality* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

⁵ Sally G. McMillen, *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3-5.

⁶ Lori D. Ginzberg, *Untidy Origins: A Story of Woman's Rights in Antebellum New York* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Karen Offen, "Women and the Question of 'Universal' Suffrage in 1848: A Transatlantic Comparison of Suffrage Rhetoric," *NWSA Journal* 11, no. 1 (1999): 150-77; Bonnie Anderson, *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movement, 1830-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Nancy A. Hewitt, "Re-Rooting American Women's Activism: Global Perspectives on 1848," in *Women's Rights and Human Rights*, ed. Patricia Grimshaw et al. (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 123-37.

rights through other avenues, especially abolitionism, legal reform, and moral reform. After Seneca Falls, woman's rights advocates coordinated a national movement based on conventions, with leaders, goals, and methods. The Declaration of Sentiments laid out this plan. By emphasizing natural rights and highlighting inequalities between women and men, the Declaration made woman's rights an essential part of the American democratic experiment, turning a widespread concern for woman's rights into an organized woman's rights movement.

BEFORE SENECA FALLS: THE MULTIPLE ROOTS OF THE WOMAN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT ⁷

On July 19–20, 1848, about three hundred people met in the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls, New York, in the first woman's rights convention ever held in the United States. One hundred of them (sixty-eight women and thirty-two men) signed the Declaration of Sentiments, patterned after the Declaration of Independence, asserting that "all men and women are created equal." One hundred and fifty years later, by the late twentieth century, the Seneca Falls convention had become an icon for women's rights—a trademark, touchstone, anchor, and orientation point. If people knew anything at all about the U.S. women's rights movement, they recognized Seneca Falls.

This study focuses on the significance of the 1848 Seneca Falls convention in the context of the origin of the woman's rights movement in the United States. From 1848 to the present, women's rights activists and historians have generally agreed that Seneca Falls was the first woman's rights convention ever held in the United States and that it initiated the organized woman's rights movement.

Yet to say that Seneca Falls was the beginning of the woman's rights movement is not to say that it was the origin of ideas about woman's rights. Seneca Falls was important because it crystallized concerns that had been widely discussed for more than twenty years. By creating a convention and a document, the Declaration of Sentiments, Seneca Falls acted like a magnifying glass, drawing attention to woman's rights in a new and focused way, creating a nucleus around which an organized movement emerged.

Seneca Falls through Elizabeth Cady Stanton's Eyes: The Traditional Story

As we in the early twenty-first century take a fresh look at the importance of Seneca Falls both in its time and our own, we are hampered as well as helped by historiography—that is, the history of the historical writing. We uncover not only the historical context of the Seneca Falls convention but also the development of later stories about Seneca Falls as the origin of the woman's rights movement. We begin with the story that Elizabeth Cady Stanton told, a story that evolved first in the 1850s and emerged into a consistent narrative by the

⁷ This essay is based on both published and archival materials. Printed sources include management publications provided by Women's Rights National Historical Park, bibliographies in major printed works, and relevant library resources (especially WorldCat and America: History and Life). Archival sources include the Stanton-Anthony Papers, as well as databases of the *New York Times* (from 1851), the *Brooklyn Eagle* (from 1841), *The North Star*, and *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (available online through Accessible Archives), the American Memory collection from the Library of Congress, and the Making of America collection (which includes more than 8,500 books and 50,000 articles published before 1900 and is available online through Cornell University and the University of Michigan). Sources also include research materials collected by Judith Wellman for her 2004 book, *The Road to Seneca Falls* (such as manuscripts, newspaper articles, church records, census records, photographs, deeds, maps, and assessment reports) and those collected by Women's Rights National Historical Park.

1870s. So powerful was that story that Ross Evans Paulson referred to it as a “legend.” Like mist over a meadow, Stanton’s story obscures many details. Yet primary sources corroborate most of its main points. It is a simplified version of a complicated, multilayered narrative.⁸

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the main organizer of the Seneca Falls convention, told the story of Seneca Falls from the perspective of her own life. In 1815, Elizabeth was born to a wealthy family in Johnstown, New York. Family, school, law, and religion dominated her early life. Daughter of Daniel Cady (a conservative lawyer) and Margaret Livingston Cady (member of a wealthy landed family), she grew up as her father’s favorite daughter. She attended the local academy, which accepted both girls and boys. In her later teens, she worked as her father’s law clerk. Raised in the local Scottish Presbyterian Church, she grew up fearing the Devil. When all her brothers died, she tried to please her father by doing all that boys could do. Especially, she learned Greek and rode horses. Her father’s response to her brilliance and desire to please was, “Oh, my daughter, if only you were a boy!”⁹

Converted to abolitionism at her cousin Gerrit Smith’s house in the later 1830s, she married abolitionist orator Henry Brewster Stanton in 1840. On their honeymoon, they attended the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London. There, delegates spent the whole first day debating whether to seat American women as delegates. When the convention rejected the credentials of American women, Stanton joined Quaker Lucretia Mott, one of the spurned delegates, resolving to call a convention when they returned home, solely to discuss the rights of woman.

Eight years later, they carried out their promise. In 1848, they met once more at the home of Quaker Jane Hunt in Waterloo, New York, together with Mott’s sister, Martha Wright, and Mary Ann M’Clintock, another Waterloo Quaker. There, Stanton “poured out her long-standing discontent” and inspired the group to “do and dare anything” on behalf of women. They wrote a call to a woman’s rights convention and published it in the *Seneca County Courier*. On July 19–20, 1848, the convention gathered at the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls, New York. About three hundred people attended, and one hundred of them signed the Declaration of Sentiments. They affirmed that “all men and women are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Woman’s rights advocates across the country took up the model of the convention and organized local, regional, and national conventions following the one at Seneca Falls. Beginning in 1850 in Worcester, Massachusetts, they held a national convention every year except one until the Civil War. Key leaders of the new movement included Elizabeth Cady Stanton as intellectual, Susan B. Anthony as organizer, Lucy Stone as lecturer, and Lucretia Mott as moral authority.

Stanton told several overlapping versions of this story beginning in 1858. The most influential versions appeared in volume 1 of *History of Woman Suffrage* (1881) and Stanton’s biography *Eighty Years and More* (1898). In 1940, Alma Lutz consolidated these versions in her biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, written with the help of Stanton’s daughter, Harriot Stanton Blatch. In 1959, Eleanor Flexner incorporated Stanton’s basic account into her influential *Century of Struggle*.¹⁰

⁸ Paulson, *Women’s Suffrage and Prohibition*; Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Woman’s Movement in America, 1848–1869* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1978); Lisa Tetrault, “The Memory of a Movement: Woman Suffrage and Reconstruction America, 1865–1890” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 2004).

⁹ For a classic account of this narrative, upon which many subsequent versions have been based, see Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman’s Rights Movement in the United States*, rev. ed. (1959; repr., Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press / Harvard University Press, 1975).

¹⁰ “Address by Elizabeth Cady Stanton to the Eighth National Woman’s Rights Convention,” in *In the*

This story of Seneca Falls fit together so well, accounted for so much of the available evidence, and appealed to audiences on so many levels that, until recently, it remained virtually unchallenged. It was the lens through which both scholars and the general public viewed the Seneca Falls convention and the origin of the woman's rights movement. As with so many great events in U.S. history, this story was timeless. Like the Pilgrims landing on Plymouth Rock or the first shot on Lexington Green, the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention was one of the stories Americans told about themselves to help them understand who they, as a people, really were. Seneca Falls was a universal story. It did not exist primarily in its own unique time and place, nor was its meaning sought there.

But the causes of Seneca Falls lay far beyond Stanton's personal experience. To call the traditional story of Seneca Falls a myth, legend, or origin story is to raise questions, not answer them. How accurate was Stanton's basic story? Who were the other ninety-nine people who signed the Declaration of Sentiments? What motivated them to sign a document that they recognized was (as Nathan Milliken, one of the signers, characterized it) "of the kind called radical"? What was the context—locally, nationally, and internationally—in which the Seneca Falls convention occurred? What was the impact of Seneca Falls across the nation?

Decentering the Narrative: Polyphonic Rhythms

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, new scholarship began to fill in gaps in our knowledge of the early woman's rights movement. Where earlier studies had focused on a few leaders and a few key events, now the story took on a more complex character. Influenced in part by the new social history that emerged in the 1960s, historians of women began to look for—and find—evidences of women's activism in many different places. As they examined woman's rights leaders in more detail, they also used techniques of community and social history to explore grassroots activism. They linked the woman's movement to other reforms, such as abolitionism and legal reform, and they discovered woman's rights ideals and activism in key communities across the United States. In so doing, they historicized our understanding of the Seneca Falls convention, taking the story of Seneca Falls out of legend and into history.

Although this scholarship confirmed much of the traditional story of Seneca Falls, elegant and powerful in its simplicity, it also corrected some of Stanton's details. It filled in rich texture about the people and places that produced woman's rights activists, and it helped define the many roots of woman's rights ideas. Stanton remained the catalyst for the convention, but new scholarship gave detailed context for her work. The convention would not have occurred without help (as Stanton herself recognized) from Lucretia Mott, Martha Wright, Jane and Richard P. Hunt, and the M'Clintock family.

Neither Stanton nor these key Quakers, however, worked in a vacuum. The woman's rights movement began far earlier than Seneca Falls, and its base was far broader than a small group of European American women abolitionists in western New York. Like other social movements, the woman's rights movement depended on the accumulation of many events and the work of many people. As Nancy Isenberg suggested, "[T]he women's rights movement did not begin in a single place nor did it focus exclusively on the vote. The process

School of Anti-Slavery, 1840–1866, vol. 1, *Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, ed. Ann B. Gordon (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 361–72; Alma Lutz, *Created Equal: A Biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (New York: John Day Company, 1940); Flexner, *Century of Struggle*; Keith Melder, *Beginnings of Sisterhood: American Woman's Rights Movement, 1800–1850* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977).

of mobilizing a women's rights movement was, in fact, far more complex." In Lori Ginzberg's memorable phrase, the woman's movement was characterized by "untidy origins."¹¹

As historians began to look at Seneca Falls in the context of the early woman's rights movement from this wider perspective, they decentered the core narrative. They understood that many different people at a grassroots level all across the country played key roles, over a long period of time. They realized that the movement itself must be redefined to include many centers of awareness outside specific woman's rights organizations. On the one hand, they expanded their understanding of the extent to which African American women and working women expressed woman's rights values (and the extent to which place, race, class, religion, and sexuality informed those values). On the other hand, they explored the ways in which ideas of woman's rights infused, sustained, and challenged African American, labor, political, and other groups not traditionally considered part of the woman's rights movement.¹²

As Elsa Barkley Brown noted for women's history in general, this new perspective challenges the linear framework of traditional historical thinking. Yet like jazz or the "gumbo ya ya" of New Orleans African American conversation, where "everybody talks at once," these stories, told simultaneously from many different perspectives, reinforce the connection that each has with the other. Each person is not only allowed but required, Brown wrote,

to be an individual, to go her or his own way, and yet to do so in concert with the group. History is also everybody talking at once, multiple rhythms being played simultaneously. The events and people we write about did not occur in isolation but in dialogue with a myriad of other people and events. In fact, at any given moment millions of people are all talking at once. As historians we try to isolate one conversation and to explore it, but the trick is then how to put that conversation in a context which makes evident its dialogue with so many others—how to make that one lyric stand alone and at the same time be in connection with all the other lyrics being sung.¹³

How to include these polyphonic, polyrhythmic voices and still be able to tell a coherent story remained a continual challenge. In particular, historians of the early woman's rights movement struggled to incorporate—both theoretically and factually—an awareness of how people of different races/ethnicities, classes, geographic areas, and gender related to woman's rights ideas. As Barkley Brown noted, "[W]e have still to recognize that being a woman is, in fact, not extractable from the context in which one is a woman—that is, race, class, time, and place." Historians recognized and incorporated issues of race, class, region, and gender for women of color, working women, Southern and Western women, and gay/lesbian/bisexual, and transgendered women. But they also understood that those who

¹¹ Nancy Isenberg, "Women's Rights Movements," in *The Oxford Companion to United States History*, ed. Paul S. Boyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), also available at <http://www.anb.org/cushrights.html>; Ginzberg, *Untidy Origins*.

¹² Martha Jones, *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), studied the extent to which questions of women's rights infused public discussions in African American institutions; Roger Levenson, *Women in Printing: Northern California, 1857–1890* (Santa Barbara, California: Capra Press, 1994), noted the extent to which early women printers were involved in the women's rights movement.

¹³ Elsa Barkley Brown, "'What Has Happened Here': The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Feminist Politics," *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 2 (1992): 297–98. Barkley Brown points out in the rest of this article that the experience of black and white women's lives is often very different and shaped one by the other.

dominated the early woman's rights movement—predominately white middle-class Northern, Protestant, heterosexual women—were also shaped by class, region, religion, and sexuality.¹⁴

Ultimately, however, historians dealt with individuals. The early woman's rights movement was not a machine, and its advocates were not interchangeable parts. Each person was unique. In the context of these polyphonic voices and the main questions about the early woman's rights movement, this study tells a coherent story of the causes and impact of the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention. It highlights the importance of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the M'Clintocks, the Hunts, and the other signers of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments, both as unique individuals and as representatives of their class, culture, and time. These people and this place remain central to the "braided narrative" (to use David Hackett Fischer's term) of the history of the early woman's rights movement.

Chronological Origins: Different Definitions

Part of our confusion over the meaning of the Seneca Falls convention lies in definitions of the word "origin." There are parallels between debates about the origin of the woman's rights movement and the origin of the Industrial Revolution. Some historians argued for the beginnings of an Industrial Revolution in the United States as early as the 1790s, some during the War of 1812, others during the 1820s, and others not until the 1840s. So, too, historians of woman's rights have found evidences of woman's rights ideas as early as the American Revolution, with many examples by the 1790s, many more by the 1820s and 1830s, and still more during the 1840s.

At the same time, some events were clearly more important than others. Just as economic historians identified the 1840s as a "take-off" period for the American Industrial Revolution—after which there would be no turning back from the country's industrial future—so we can identify the 1840s as the take-off period for the woman's rights movement, the period in which a nascent movement coalesced out of its divergent parts and became a new and separate entity. The critical event for that movement, after which there would be no turning back, was the Seneca Falls convention.¹⁵

To borrow a term from physics, Seneca Falls was a "nucleating agent."¹⁶ At a point when water has reached the freezing point, one small motion will change it into ice. When certain chemical substances are incorporated into plastics, they form nuclei around which crystals grow. Seneca Falls, too, acted as the nucleus around which a movement began to crystallize, with clear roots in the past but with new direction, energy, and focus that made it something different from its parts. Before Seneca Falls, Americans discussed ideas about woman's rights as apart of abolitionism, temperance, legal reform, or moral reform. Seneca Falls created a separate woman's rights movement, with goals, methods, and leaders, carrying out the agenda identified in the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments.

Sociologist Steven M. Buechler reached a similar conclusion in his discussion of social movement organization. Seneca Falls in 1848 and the formation of national woman suffrage

¹⁴ Barkely Brown, "What Has Happened Here," 300.

¹⁵ Walter Rostow, *Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

¹⁶ Thanks to James Livingston of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and author with Sherry Penney of *A Very Dangerous Woman: Martha Wright and Women's Rights* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004).

organizations in 1869 both initiated new phases of the women's rights movement, Buechler argued:

If movements are defined on the basis of distinct sentiments, then the women's movement may be dated from the early to mid-1840s. If movements are defined on the basis of networks of people acting on distinct sentiments, then the women's movement may be dated from the series of women's rights conventions initiated at Seneca Falls in 1848 and continuing over the next dozen years. If movements are defined on the basis of independent movement organizations, however, then the women's movement must be dated from the formation of the national woman suffrage organizations, which appeared only after the Civil War.¹⁷

Like historians over the years, even Stanton's contemporaries recognized the problem of defining origins for the formal woman's movement. They suggested several different origin years. For example, Lucretia Mott identified 1837, the year of the first Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women as the origin of the movement. "From the time of the 1st. convention of women—in New Y [*sic*] 1837—the battle began," she wrote Stanton in 1855.¹⁸

In 1997, Ann Gordon and Bettye Collier-Thomas echoed Mott's assessment, arguing that, for African American women, the 1837 Anti-Slavery Convention, as an interracial gathering designed to define women's roles independently from men's, should replace the Seneca Falls convention of 1848 as the origin of the movement, because it emphasized "the preeminence of antislavery agitation in the political history of African Americans, including women."¹⁹

Stanton herself suggested at least three origin dates for the woman's rights movement: 1840, 1848, and 1850. In both the *History of Woman Suffrage* (1881) and her autobiography (1898), she claimed that the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840 was the beginning of the woman's rights movement. By excluding women as delegates, she wrote, the convention "gave rise to the movement for women's political equality both in England and the United States," and "the movement for woman's suffrage, both in England and America, may be dated from this World's Anti-Slavery Convention." In 1858, Stanton claimed that "in our own country, in 1848, a large body of men and women responded to a Call for a Woman's Rights Convention,—the first of the kind ever held." Stanton also claimed that, in writing the Declaration of Sentiments for the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention, she and the M'Clintock family examined "reports of Peace, Temperance, and Anti-Slavery conventions . . . but all alike seemed too tame and pacific for the inauguration of a rebellion such as the world had never before seen," thus implying that the Seneca Falls convention was the beginning of the movement for woman's rights. Finally, in 1870, at the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the first national woman's rights convention held in Worcester, Massachusetts, emphasized Worcester as the beginning of the woman's rights movement. Attempting to bring New England women into the National American Woman Suffrage

¹⁷ Steven M. Buechler, *Women's Movements in the United States: Woman Suffrage, Equal Rights, and Beyond* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 21.

¹⁸ Lucretia Mott to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 3 October 1848, in Gordon, *Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, vol. 1 (see note 9), 126–30; Lucretia Mott to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 16 March 1855, in *Selected Letters of Lucretia Coffin Mott*, ed. Beverly Wilson Palmer (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

¹⁹ Ann D. Gordon with Bettye Collier-Thomas, eds., *African American Women and the Vote, 1837–1965* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 2–3.

Association, Stanton asserted that “the movement in England, as in America, may be dated from the first National Convention, held in Worcester, Mass., October, 1850.”²⁰

By the 1850s, woman's rights advocates consistently identified Seneca Falls and Rochester, New York, as the first woman's rights conventions; Salem, Ohio, as the first statewide convention; and Worcester, Massachusetts, as the first national convention. At Syracuse in 1852, they reported,

the first Conventions on the subject were held at Seneca Falls, and Rochester, N.Y., in the summer of 1848. They based their claims on the Declaration of Independence: demanded equal rights; published their sentiments over their own names; at the head of the list stood the name of Lucretia Mott. A similar Convention was held at Salem, Ohio, in May, 1850, an able report of which was published, and widely circulated. The first National Convention was held at Worcester, Mass., Oct. 1850.²¹

In Cleveland in 1853, Frances Dana Gage identified Seneca Falls as the first woman's rights convention. “I think the first Woman's Rights Convention ever called in the United States, was called by a band of earnest men and women, at Seneca Falls, N.Y., in the fall of 1848,” noted Gage.²²

In her speech at the twentieth anniversary of the Worcester convention, held at Apollo Hall in New York City in 1870, Paulina Wright Davis suggested that the 1839 National Woman's Anti-Slavery Convention in Philadelphia “may be said to have inaugurated the national work of women,” because of the efforts of both Angelina Grimké and Abby Kelley. Davis also noted that “two years previous to the issue of the call of 1850, there had been three conventions held, one in Seneca Falls, one in Rochester, N.Y., and one in Ohio.”²³

In her biography of Lucy Stone, Joelle Million echoed the importance of the Worcester convention, which Lucy Stone helped to organize. John McClymer, who wrote a brief study of the Worcester convention at the time of its 150th anniversary, also emphasized Worcester as the true origin of the movement. “This meeting, not the gathering at Seneca Falls in 1848, was the convention the first generation of woman's rights proponents regarded as igniting the women's rights movement in the United States,” he noted.²⁴

²⁰ “Address by Elizabeth Cady Stanton to the Eighth National Woman's Rights Convention,” 361–72; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Eighty Years and More* (1898; repr., Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), 82; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joselyn Gage, *History Of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 1 (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1881–82), 62, 68; Paulina Wright Davis, *History of the National Woman's Rights Movement for Twenty Years: with the Proceedings of the Decade Meeting held at Apollo Hall, October 20, 1870, from 1850 to 1870* (New York: Journeymen Printers' Co-operative Association, 1871), 5; McClymer, *This High and Holy Moment*, xiii–xiv.

²¹ *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Syracuse, September 8th, 9th and 10th, 1852* (Syracuse, New York: J.E. Masters, 1852), iii, 6, 30–35.

²² *Proceedings of the National Women's Rights Convention, Held at Cleveland, Ohio, on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, October 5th, 6th, and 7th, 1853* (Cleveland, Ohio: Gray, Beardsley, Spear and Co., 1854), 4–5.

²³ Davis, *History of the National Woman's Rights Movement*, 5, 8. Davis also had the intriguing suggestion that Sarah Tyndale of Philadelphia had promoted the idea of a convention about 1848: “Indeed the idea of such a convention had often been discussed in her home, more than two years before,” noted Davis, 14; McClymer, *This High and Holy Moment*, xiii–xiv.

²⁴ Joelle Million, *Woman's Voice, Woman's Place: Lucy Stone and the Birth of the Woman's Rights Movement* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003), 110; John F. McClymer, “How Do Contemporary Newspaper Accounts of the 1850 Worcester Woman's Rights Convention Enhance Our

Harriet Taylor, however, inspired by reports of the Worcester convention to write “Enfranchisement of Women” for the British publication *Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review*, thought that the first “public manifestation” of a political movement “not merely *for women*, but *by them*” for “the enfranchisement of women; their admission, in law and in fact, to equality in all rights, political, civil and social, with the male citizens of the community” was the convention held earlier that year in Salem, Ohio.²⁵

The *New York Sun*, reporting on the 1870 Worcester celebration, noted that Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton had called “the first meeting for the inauguration of the woman’s rights movement” at Seneca Falls in 1848. “This was a local meeting,” asserted the *Sun*. “The first National Convention assembled at Worcester, 1850 . . . the real national commencement of the suffrage movement.” Three of the first five people listed by the *Sun* at the 1850 meeting had been at the earlier Seneca Falls convention: Mott, Stanton, and Martha Wright. The other two names listed were those of Susan B. Anthony and Matilda Joslyn Gage, both central New Yorkers, both leaders in the National Woman Suffrage Association.²⁶

Seneca Falls was the nucleating event of the early woman’s rights movement, significant because it crystallized widespread woman’s rights sentiments into what became an organized movement. As the first convention called explicitly to discuss woman’s rights, Seneca Falls occurred in the context of earlier abolitionist conventions (including the 1837 woman’s antislavery convention and the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840) and formed the prototype for later woman’s rights conventions (including the first state woman’s rights convention in Salem, Ohio, in May 1850, and the first national woman’s rights convention in Worcester, Massachusetts, in October 1850).

Recent Explorations in the Early Woman’s Rights Movement

As historians in the last decades of the twentieth century began to explore the Seneca Falls convention more closely, they produced the building blocks of a new, more inclusive narrative, based on eight major areas of research:²⁷

Precedents. While no one disputes that abolitionism was a proving ground for woman’s rights, recent research has also explored other influences, especially legal reform. Temperance, Transcendentalism, reform movements within Quakerism, political abolitionism, Native American models, spiritualism, and popular literature by and for women also affected the women and men who signed the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments, as well as people in the larger culture. Ideas of late eighteenth-century protofeminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Abigail Adams, Judith Sargent Murray, and Charles Brockden Brown merged into widespread if less well-known political debates over political, legal, and constitutional rights in New Jersey (where women voted until 1807), New York (where women as property holders and voters became a subject for political debate in the 1821 and

Understanding of the Issues Debated at That Meeting?” in *Women and Social Movements*, ed. Katharine Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin (Alexandria, Virginia: Alexander Street Press, 2006). For further discussion of the Worcester convention, see McClymer, *This High and Holy Moment*.

²⁵ [Harriet Taylor], “Enfranchisement of Women,” reprinted from the *Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review* for July 1851, *Woman’s Rights Tracts*, . . . No. 4 (Syracuse, New York: 1852 or 1853), 1, available at http://www.assumption.edu/whw/old/Taylor_Enfranchisement.

²⁶ Davis, *History of the National Woman’s Rights Movement*, 3–4.

²⁷ For further discussion of the content of these works, see the historiographical section later in this essay.

1846 constitutional conventions), Illinois (where no less a politician than Abraham Lincoln ran on a platform that included voting rights for women in 1837), Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and elsewhere. In each case, women and men brought existing woman's rights sensibilities into these debates.

Biographies of woman's rights advocates. New biographies and edited manuscript collections of women and woman's rights men and women, including people (such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Elizabeth M'Clintock, Lucretia Mott, Frederick Douglass, Martha Wright, and Amy Post) who attended the Seneca Falls convention and those who joined them as the movement developed (Susan B. Anthony, Antoinette Brown Blackwell, Anna Dickinson, Abby Kelley Foster, Matilda Joslyn Gage, Sarah and Angelina Grimké, Clarina I.H. Nichols, Lucy Stone, Sojourner Truth, and others), are beginning to reshape our understanding of how the movement operated at both national and local levels. Much remains to be done. Except for the work of Ann Gordon in the published volumes of the Stanton-Anthony papers, little recent scholarly work has appeared on Anthony. Several "second-tier" woman's rights leaders (such as Betsy Mix Cowles, and Benjamin Jones and Jane Elizabeth Hitchcock Jones) await biographies as well. Gerrit Smith still awaits a major edited collection of papers and biography. The impact and influence of women's rights on African American women such as Frances E.W. Harper is emerging as a major topic.

Community studies. Increasingly, we are aware that national debates were anchored in local communities. Local studies such as Lori Ginzberg's *Untidy Origins* on Jefferson County, New York, and Judith Wellman's *The Road to Seneca Falls* are models for what might be done elsewhere—from Ogdensburg, New York, where a lyceum lecturer argued that the Declaration of Independence applied fully to women; to the wonderfully sarcastic petition signed in March 1848 by forty-four "married ladies" in Darien and Covington, New York, who argued that because women had always been treated as infants, idiots, and imbeciles, they saw no reason any longer to obey the laws; to the heartfelt and relieved response of women in Bristol, New York, when they received news of the Seneca Falls convention, that at last something had been done that reflected the ideas of women in their community. All of these formed the context for the Seneca Falls convention and help explain its powerful impact. John McClymer's study of the first national woman's rights convention in Worcester, Massachusetts, offered a beginning for the Worcester community. Much work remains to be done for places such as Salem, Ohio; Green Plain, Ohio; Adrian, Michigan; and Kennet Square, Pennsylvania, and in key states such as Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Kansas, and California. Studies of suffrage activism at the local level after the Civil War are beginning to fill in our knowledge of the spread of the movement in the late nineteenth century.

Transnational/intercultural context. Recent work by Bonnie Anderson, Nancy Hewitt, and others has emphasized that the women's movement was not solely a U.S. phenomenon but occurred transnationally. In the weeks surrounding the Seneca Falls convention, participants read regular reports of revolutions in France, Germany, and Italy. The relationship between events in the United States and Western Europe was particularly important in 1848, but connections with women in Asia (including the work of Pandita Ramabai in India and the influence of Hinduism and theosophy) also deserve exploration. The importance of Native Americans, reflected in the experience of Matilda Joslyn Gage and others (highlighted by Sally Roesch Wagner) might be seen as part of this transnational intercultural influence.

Impact of the movement after the Civil War. After 1848, the impact of the early woman's rights movement profoundly affected people across the nation. Suffrage became one focus, but it was only one. New work on the relationship between the National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association, and on the relationship between suffrage and the Women's Christian Temperance Union opened new questions. Local suffrage groups often bridged the gap that seemed to loom so wide between these

national organizations. Everywhere, women's rights went far beyond suffrage to infuse efforts on behalf of women in every major institution—families, churches, schools, political organizations, and scholarly fields such as anthropology and sociology—throughout the country. Western women activists, exploiting the fluid political situation in the West, forged coalitions across lines of class and ethnicity to bring woman's suffrage to western states.

Intersection of race, class, and gender. The standard interpretation has been that the early woman's rights movement, while rooted in abolitionism and concerned about issues of race, subsumed differences among women into the universal category of "woman," usually defined as middle-class urban white women. The issue was not so simple. Like the signers of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments, woman's rights reformers across the country came from a wide variety of backgrounds. Their early conventions and speeches showed a sensitivity to class and race that twentieth-century historians have yet to address in a coherent way.

The connection between industrialization and the early woman's rights movement, identified in Seneca Falls and the neighboring village of Waterloo, New York, needs further exploration. As Thomas Dublin and others have pointed out, factory women were often sympathetic to woman's rights, but the general reaction of women workers and the working-class press to women's rights awaits detailed study.

As Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Martha Jones, Carla L. Peterson, and others have shown, many black women, including Frances E.W. Haper, Sarah Remond, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, and the women of the Purvis-Forten family, played leadership roles in the early woman's rights movement. Debates about women's roles occurred within the African American community, independently from the white-dominated organized woman's rights movement. Many African American men as well as women were active woman's rights supporters in the early years, including Frederick Douglass (the only known African American signer of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments), William C. Nell (who attended, with Douglass, the Rochester woman's rights convention), J.B. Sanderson (a friend of signer Amy Post), Jermain Loguen (the African American vice president of the New York State Woman's Rights Convention in 1853), and Garrisonian abolitionist lecturer Charles Remond, but only Douglass has been adequately documented. Harriet Tubman's work with women's groups after the Civil War deserves further study. Martha Jones made a major contribution to debates in the public arena over woman's rights within antebellum black institutions (including newspapers, schools, churches, and conventions).

Women and religion. Beginning in the 1980s, historians began to explore in detail the connection between religion and woman's rights. While many woman's rights activists remained committed to mainstream religious denominations (as Beverly Ann Zink-Hardesty and Nancy Hardesty noted), many of the most important early leaders left Protestant churches. For Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Matilda Joslyn Gage, Maria W. Stewart, and other antebellum woman's rights leaders, the relationship between the dominant Christian tradition and woman's rights was more complex. Woman's rights activists espoused a worldview that defined human beings as being essentially good and having immediate personal access to God, whom they viewed as a benevolent father-mother Spirit. Margaret Hope Bacon, Nancy Hewitt, Christopher Densmore, Judith Wellman, and others have pointed out the importance of Quakers to the early woman's rights movement, at Seneca Falls and elsewhere.

Woman's rights theory. Scholars have explored class identities for early women's rights advocates and have also explored Mary Beard's emphasis on economic thought. Aileen Kraditor's emphasis on the shift from natural rights theory to pragmatism formed the basis for new interest in connecting women's rights to traditional political theory (by Suzanne Marilley and others). Elisabeth Griffith's use of social learning theory opened up possibilities that have yet to be followed consistently. Many historians have been influenced by a

postmodern emphasis on gender. Areas for productive research include the expansion of public space, as explored by Jurgen Habermas (which will help conceptualize the use of such places as the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls for meetings by and for women), and a discussion of Seneca Falls as poised at the intersection of republicanism versus liberalism.

As Nancy Hewitt noted in her 1984 book on Rochester women reformers, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872*, recent historical work challenged the old paradigm that the woman's movement emerged from a progression of women's education followed by involvement in benevolent reform organizations, temperance campaigns, and abolitionism that finally (and almost inevitably) led to Seneca Falls and the organized woman's rights movement. Historians realized, first, that woman's rights activists often brought their egalitarian ideals with them when they entered abolitionist, legal reform, and other movements; second, that woman's rights leaders were not usually the same women who were most active in benevolent reform and education; and third, that the organized woman's rights movement was like a ship floating in a much larger sea, in which support for woman's rights emerged from a variety of different groups and in an array of venues.

As historians looked at the early woman's rights movement from these perspectives, they told the narrative from the perspective of many different people, in many different places. They contextualized and historicized the Seneca Falls convention. In so doing, they challenged what some have viewed as the hegemonic story of Stanton, Anthony, Stone, and Mott as the primary leaders of the early (white middle-class) women's movement. Yet, as we struggle to understand the impact of women's rights at the grassroots level on people and places all over this country (and the world), as well as the role local people played in initiating and sustaining movement activism, it remains crucial to emphasize also the key role of these leaders in the emerging movement. Their story is not the only story, but it is one central story.

In a 2002 review of several books on the early women's movement, Lori Ginzberg argued, "[T]he history of U.S. feminism has been permanently transformed by political activists' and historians' insights into the complexities of U.S. political life and its gendered and racial character." She concluded that each of several new books "offers a side glance that shifts our focus and challenges our confidence in what we know. As with all small shifts, together they are seismic, shaking up the ground on which the traditional story once stood, while not (yet) offering up a new one to take its place."²⁸ Such an assessment hints at future approaches to understanding beginnings of the woman's rights movement as a whole.

In terms of the Seneca Falls convention itself—one specific, unique event, viewed in the context of the larger movement—we are beginning to understand what happened, why it happened, and what its impact was. Clearly, the Seneca Falls women's rights convention—called at the Hunt house in Waterloo, New York, organized by Stanton and the M'Clintocks at the Stanton and M'Clintock houses in Seneca Falls and Waterloo, and held at the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls on July 19–20, 1848—was the first woman's rights convention. But it did not occur in isolation. With its declaration that "all men and women are created equal," the Seneca Falls convention functioned as a catalyst, distilling widespread local expressions of woman's rights ideals and actions into the beginnings of a national movement. As the first organized convention for woman's rights, Seneca Falls gained its importance only because it occurred after decades of debate about woman's rights, culminating in the take-off period of the 1840s. By 1848, Americans in general and New Yorkers in particular had been debating the rights of woman locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally for more than two decades, touching almost every area of life. In the United States these debates had been particularly heated among abolitionists and legal

²⁸ Lori D. Ginzberg, "Reviewing the First Wave," *Feminist Studies* 28, no. 2 (2002): 419–34.

reformers (both women and men). They built, however, on organized networks of other reformers from many cultural traditions. Each group claimed an increasing share of public space, and each challenged the boundaries of prescribed gender roles.

Gerda Lerner, one of the pioneers of American women's history argued, "The Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Convention marked the beginning of the woman's rights movement. . . . The small spark figuratively ignited at Seneca Falls never produced revolutions, usurpation of power or wars. Yet it led to a transformation of consciousness and a movement of empowerment on behalf of half the human race, which hardly has its equal in human history." Much of the credit for this impact was due to the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments. "Stunning in its energy, its precision, and its foresight," as Linda Kerber and Jane DeHart noted, this Declaration connected women's rights directly to core American values of natural rights.²⁹

The rest of this overview deals in more detail with five aspects of Seneca Falls in the context of the early woman's rights movement. The first part considers the background of woman's rights, beginning in the late eighteenth century. The second section focuses on the Seneca Falls convention itself. The last three parts outline how activists, historians, and the general public viewed the Seneca Falls convention from 1848 to the present. Woman's rights activists began immediately to tell the story of Seneca Falls in the 1850s and 1860s, creating what some later called the legend of Seneca Falls. With the renewal of interest in women's history in the late twentieth century, historians looked once more at the Seneca Falls convention in the context of its own time, reclaiming this key story as a historical event.

²⁹ Gerda Lerner, "The Meanings of Seneca Falls, 1848–1998," *Dissent* (Fall 1998): 35–41, reprinted in Linda Kerber and Jane Sherron DeHart, *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 201–6; Linda Kerber and Jane Sherron DeHart, *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 201.

THE CONTEXT: THE MANY ROOTS OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS, 1776-1848

In the century between the American Revolution and the end of the Civil War, debates about gender roles took place in every U.S. institution—political parties, workplaces, families, schools, churches, voluntary organizations, and—most importantly—abolitionism and the law. The intellectual and social beginnings of the woman's rights movement thus emerged long before the convention at Seneca Falls.

Not until Seneca Falls, however, did these disparate impulses coalesce into an organized movement, different from its individual parts. In two ways, Seneca Falls crystallized these unfocused ideas about woman's rights into a movement:

1. The Seneca Falls convention offered the model of using conventions to promote a movement. Even after woman's rights advocates formed permanent national associations in 1869, they continued to use conventions as a major organizing force.
2. Asserting that "all men and women are created equal," the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments tied woman's rights directly to the founding ideals of the United States, as stated in the Declaration of Independence.

Politics, 1776–1820

The roots of the women's rights movement emerged clearly during the Revolutionary War. Many writers supported women's equality. Most famous was Abigail Adams, who chided her husband John, then on the committee to draft the Declaration of Independence:

In the new code of laws, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion."³⁰

Although John responded with humor and even sympathy, there was little he could do, in the midst of a war, to resolve the question of women's legal and political rights. Consequently, as adopted, the Declaration of Independence reflected neither the rights of women nor of African Americans (male or female). Its preamble, however, set a standard that women of all colors and classes and African Americans of both sexes would use to argue for legal and political equality through the rest of U.S. history, including at Seneca Falls, seventy-two years later:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

Egalitarian political ideas found support in social structures that eroded traditional hierarchies. The American Revolution politicized women of all backgrounds—including Native American women, African American women, and European American women. Their choices often stretched the boundaries of established gender roles. For example, Molly Brant, clan mother for the Mohawk, played a direct military role, overseeing troops and military operations. Of the approximately fifty-five thousand African Americans who fled

³⁰ Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31, 1776, reprinted in *The Feminist Papers*, ed. Alice Rossi (New York: Bantam, 1974).

slavery for freedom, as many as one-third were women. Patriot women kept the farms going while men were gone. Many women acted as nurses, washerwomen, and cooks in the field. Some women, such as Deborah Sampson and Molly Pitcher, served as soldiers. While military service was not frequent, these female soldiers served to remind everyone—men and women alike—that women were capable of playing a wide variety of roles. In addition, even women's traditional activities took on political connotations: spinning homespun cloth (as a substitute for buying British cloth) became a political act. So did boycotting tea and rum. It was no accident that one of the earliest books in women's history was Elizabeth Ellet's *Women of the American Revolution*, published in 1848.³¹

Despite the valuable contributions of women and African Americans during the American Revolution, when delegates to the constitutional convention drafted a new Constitution in the hot Philadelphia summer of 1787, they counted people in slavery, both women and men, as three-fifths of a person. While they counted free women, both black and white, as full citizens, they seem never to have considered women as potential voters. Every reference to a person in the Constitution—and there are more than thirty—is to “he,” “him,” or “his.” Moreover, although it might be argued that these male pronouns were intended to encompass citizens of whatever gender, it became clear in practice that women and men did not have equal status as citizens of the new republic. In republican theory, voters were people of civic virtue. They gave up something of their own private means for the public good—i.e., they paid taxes or served in the militia. Because both of these activities were generally limited to males, only men could vote in most states of the new republic.

Some Americans saw the irony of a supposed democracy that excluded half its citizens from voting. Charles Brockden Brown, of Quaker background and one of the country's first novelists, wrote a rambling essay called *Alcuin* (1798–1815), in which a young man named Alcuin asked Mrs. Carter what she thought of the new Constitution. Mrs. Carter minced no words, saying,

What have I, as a woman, to do with politics? Even the government of our country, which is said to be the freest in the world, passes over women as if they were not. We are excluded from all political rights without the least ceremony. Law-makers thought as little of comprehending us in their code of liberty, as if we were pigs, or sheep. The maxims of constitution-makers sound well. “All power is derived from the people. Liberty is everyone's birthright. . . .” Plausible and specious maxims! But fallacious. . . . I cannot celebrate the equity of that scheme of government which classes me with dogs and swine.³²

Because qualifications for voters were left to the states, however, some women did vote in the new republic. In New Jersey, the 1776 constitution noted only that “all inhabitants” who met property and residence requirements could vote. As a result, African American women voted until 1796 and white women until 1807.³³

The revolutionary generation viewed early childhood education as the basis for republican citizenship, so motherhood assumed major political importance. Women received an education to prepare them for their role as mothers rather than for their

³¹ Elizabeth Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution*, 5th ed. (1848; repr., American History Imprints, 2004); Cokie Roberts, *Founding Mothers: Women Who Raised Our Nation* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005).

³² Charles Brockden Brown, *Alcuin* (1798–1815; reprint, New York: Grossman Publishers, 1971).

³³ Lucy Stone, *Woman Suffrage in New Jersey, An Address. Delivered at a Hearing Before the Legislature, 6th March 1867* (Boston: C.H. Simonds, 1867); Judith Apter Klinghoffer and Lois Elkis, “The Petticoat Electors: Women's Suffrage in New Jersey, 1776–1807,” *Journal of the Early Republic* (1992): 159.

independent role as citizens. In 1980, Linda Kerber defined this as “Republican motherhood,” in which a woman “was a citizen but not really a constituent.” In fact, “[t]he ambivalent relationship between motherhood and citizenship,” noted Kerber, “would be one of the most lasting, and most paradoxical, legacies of the Revolutionary generation.”³⁴

Most Americans were content with this compromise. But women and men at the Seneca Falls convention challenged this paradox. They resolved that women should not be simply mothers but also full and independent citizens (property owners, workers, taxpayers, and voters) in the United States.

Economics

Seneca Falls in 1848 was at the cutting edge of dramatic economic change—from an agricultural economy, where the fastest transportation was a horse on land or a sailing ship on the sea, and where ordinary people manufactured most of their consumer goods at home—to an economy based on cities, factories, railroads, and a national market. Such change helped explain why the woman's rights convention occurred when and where it did.

In the late eighteenth century, most Americans of whatever sex or color—excluding Native Americans—lived within fifty miles of the Atlantic coast. Only five population centers were large enough to be called cities, and all were located along the coast: from Boston, New York, Philadelphia in the North to Baltimore and Charleston in the South. By 1860, however, the country numbered twenty million (including four million people in slavery), stretching from Maine to California, Florida to Oregon. In addition, by the early 1800s, working people in Great Britain and then in the United States began to shift from hand manufacture to the use of machines; from small-scale production, centered in the home, to mass production, centered in factories; from craft and apprentice systems of labor to factory workers; from small to large capital investment.

Such massive structural transformations affected the personal lives of people everywhere, whether producers or consumers. A new system of transportation, based on canals, railroads, and steamships, increased both geographic expansion and economic integration. New machinery sustained large-scale factories and new methods of agricultural production, too, and new urban markets increased the demand for wheat, dairy products, rice, sugar, and—most of all—cotton. New textile factories in the North voraciously demanded more and more cotton, most of it grown by people enslaved in the South.

An expanding economy made most Americans more prosperous, even as it reinforced class distinctions. In 1800, 10 percent of the nation's families owned one-third to one-half of the nation's wealth. By 1850, 10 percent of families owned two-thirds of the wealth. At the same time, wages for free labor rose consistently, and an urban middle class gained strength.

These developments led to increasing regionalism. Industrialization, urbanization, and transportation changes hit the Northeast most directly. Located between eastern seaports and the Great Lakes, with rapidly flowing streams for waterpower, upstate New York felt these changes with particular impact. Seneca Falls was at the cutting edge of each of these economic shifts. Every major transportation system—rivers, turnpikes, the Erie Canal, and two major east-west railroads—went through Seneca Falls and the neighboring village of Waterloo. Rich farmlands, punctuated with rapidly flowing creeks and rivers, attracted both agricultural and industrial entrepreneurs to both villages.

Beginning in the 1790s, these changes reached their launching point—a point of no return—in the 1840s. It was no accident that these revolutionary transformations in the material conditions of life affected most directly the generation that initiated abolitionism

³⁴ Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 94–95.

and the early woman's rights movement. And it was no accident that people in small cities such as Seneca Falls and Waterloo, at the forefront of these economic changes, were also leaders of these reform movements.

Economic transformations had a major impact on women's lives and roles. Women had always been economically important, both inside the home and outside of it. Everywhere, women worked on farms, whether in slavery or in freedom, producing dairy and field crops in the North and Midwest and cotton, rice, and corn in the South. As John Mack Faragher suggested, women and men in free farm families (and perhaps similarly in families in slavery) often played very different economic roles. Women provided or processed almost all of life's essentials, including food and clothing, but their work was inward-looking and qualitative, based on subsistence labor. Men, however, created products for sale in the market. Their work was outward-looking, based on quantitative measures. Yet the picture was different on many dairy farms. As Nancy Grey Osterud and Joan Jensen showed, women on dairy farms in Pennsylvania and New York produced butter, cheese, eggs, and milk for the market, and market production gave women power.³⁵

In addition, some women worked for pay outside the home. In cities such as Seneca Falls and Waterloo, women might work as domestics, seamstresses, or milliners. Increasing numbers of women became teachers. Local school boards liked to hire women, because they paid them one-quarter to one-third of a male teacher's salary. A few young women worked in factories, such as the woolen mills in Seneca Falls and Waterloo. Among their products was cloth, both woolen and cotton, and carpets. As Thomas Dublin has shown, women often found this work rewarding. Their independent spirit made them welcome lecturers on abolitionism, labor reform, and woman's rights. Similarly, in the shoe manufactories of Lynn, Massachusetts, reform ideas found many sympathizers. To what extent this receptivity emerged from women's economic situation or from their Congregational and Quaker religious backgrounds, however, is a question that has not received adequate study.³⁶

Factory production had a major and immediate impact on how women functioned inside their homes, as well. In Seneca Falls, Waterloo, and elsewhere, women became adept consumers. As machine-made goods—cloth, carpets, mirrors, wallpaper, paint, flow blue crockery, ironware—became readily available, women's work in the home did not necessarily become less arduous, but it changed in nature. Women learned to sew with the new sewing machine, for example, instead of using only needle and thread. They did not sew less, but the quality of their product improved.³⁷

Production of cotton cloth transformed the nation's economy as well as the lives of individual Americans. From 1820 to 1860, slave-grown cotton was the country's single largest (and most valuable) export, forming almost 60 percent of American exports by 1860. The

³⁵ John Mack Faragher, *Men and Women on the Overland Trail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Nancy Grey Osterud, *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991); Joan Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750–1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

³⁶ Thomas Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work: New England Lives in the Industrial Revolution* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994); Mary Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780–1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

³⁷ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), argues that “labor-saving devices” actually do not save time at all, but increase expectations. Although Cowan's argument focuses on the early twentieth century, the same thesis works well for the application of technology to household work in the mid-nineteenth century.

population that lived in slavery expanded proportionately, from 1.5 million in 1820 to 4 million in 1860 (20 percent of the country's workers).

Women in slavery faced entirely different challenges from those faced by free women. Slaveholders valued enslaved women doubly for their ability both as workers and mothers, as producers and reproducers. Slave law recognized neither marriages nor parental rights of people held in slavery; historian Herbert Gutman has noted that one-sixth of married slave couples were split by sale, and half the people in slavery could expect to be sold. As Harriet Jacobs, who escaped from slavery in Edenton, North Carolina, wrote in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, "Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women."³⁸

In New York State, slavery was legal until 1827. During the colonial period, 12–15 percent of New York State's population was enslaved. Some of those who later became abolitionists, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, grew up with people enslaved in their households.³⁹

Northerners, including those in Seneca Falls, recognized their links to slavery. Textile mill owners in both Seneca Falls and Waterloo chose to operate woolen mills—buying wool grown by local sheep farmers—rather than cotton mills that relied on slave-grown cotton. Thomas M'Clintock, abolitionist owner of a drugstore in Waterloo, advertised "the produce of free labor."⁴⁰

Family patterns

Family structures were in dynamic tension with changing economic patterns. As the economy shifted, families in Seneca Falls and Waterloo, as elsewhere, struggled to adapt and to provide for their members socially, economically, and emotionally. Overall, the U.S. birthrate dropped dramatically, from about 8 children per family in 1750 to 7 children per family in 1800 to 5 or 6 in 1850 to 3.5 in 1900 to 1.8 in 1990. Women began to shift their emphasis from childbearing to child rearing. Changing technologies of birth control (including abstinence, withdrawal, a sponge with alum, John Humphrey Noyes' and Harriet Noyes' "male continence," and abortion) were not the driving force behind this drop in the birthrate. Rather, technology followed a conscious shift in values. Whereas children were economic assets on farms, they became economic liabilities in cities, where each child cost more, in terms of food, clothing, shelter, and education. Then, too, many women feared childbirth. When women had a choice, they avoided too many pregnancies.⁴¹

Within some middle-class families, a model of companionate marriage emerged, in which men and women shared responsibility for family functioning, and wives gained authority over children's care and household management. These marriages promoted for women a status that Daniel Scott Smith called "domestic feminism." For many women's

³⁸ Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, rev. ed. (1985; reprint, New York: Norton, 1999); Herbert Gutman, *Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976); Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987).

³⁹ Edgar J. McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York* (1966; reprint, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2001).

⁴⁰ Advertisement, May 6, 1840, *Seneca Observer* [sic], Waterloo Historical Society.

⁴¹ Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, "The Rise of the Democratic Family," in *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of the American Family Life* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 43–65; Faragher, "The Midwestern Farm Family," 119.

rights activists (including Stanton herself), extended families themselves formed a source of egalitarian energy. They allowed married women to create a balance between the husband-wife bond and their families of origin.⁴²

Abolitionists and woman's rights activists contrasted their ideal of family life with the perceived reality of African American families under slavery, in which husbands and wives, sisters and brothers, parents and children found themselves in competition with enslavers for control of family life. Although marriage between people in slavery was nowhere legal under white people's laws, enslaved men and women often went to great lengths to maintain ties between husbands and wives, parents and children. Naming patterns suggest the importance of slave families, as parents often named their children after relatives of both fathers and mothers. Motherhood could be both a woman's greatest joy and her greatest curse, however, as slave owners could sell children away from their parents without warning. Margaret Garner, a slave woman from Kentucky, became known as the "Black Medea" because she killed her children in 1856 rather than see them returned to slavery. Her story became the basis of Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*.⁴³

Some woman's rights advocates, particularly those among Quaker women and women such as Matilda Joslyn Gage, were also aware of gender roles in Native American cultures. Family structures for traditional Native American women, based on female-headed clans, were entirely different from European-defined patriarchal families. Among the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), for example, women were heads of clans; they chose the chiefs; and, with the chiefs and the warriors, they formed one of the three main political groups. Motherhood was not the basis for exclusion from public debate but the core basis of family and community power.⁴⁴

Education

Many women at the Seneca Falls convention were the product of some of the best education available to girls and women in the early nineteenth century. They were educated in local primary schools, academies, Quaker schools, and (in the case of Elizabeth Cady Stanton) Emma Willard's Troy Female Seminary.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, many girls received training at home or through local private schools. Phyllis Wheatley, born in Africa and brought in slavery to Massachusetts, became a published poet as a result of literary training she received at home. Early woman's rights advocates such as the American writer Judith Sargent Murray (who urged each woman to "Reverence thyself") and the British author Mary Wollstonecraft viewed women's education as the first step toward women's liberation. In fact,

⁴² Daniel Scott Smith, "Family Limitation, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America," *Feminist Studies* 1:3-4 (1973): 40-57; Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: Free Press, 1988); Wellman, *Road to Seneca Falls*, 96-99.

⁴³ White, *A'rn't I a Woman?*; Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Plume, 1998); Steven Weisenburger, *Modern Medea: A Family Story of Slavery and Child-Murder from the Old South* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998); Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, "The Shaping of the Afro-American Family," in *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of the American Family Life* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 67-80.

⁴⁴ Nancy Shoemaker, "The Rise or Fall of Iroquois Women," *Journal of Women's History* 2, no. 3 (1991): 39-55; Sally Roesch Wagner, *Sisters in Spirit: Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Influence on Early American Feminists* (Summertown, Tennessee: Native Voices, 2001); Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (New York: Knopf, 1973).

Wollstonecraft emphasized women's education in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1795 and widely read by woman's rights advocates in the nineteenth century.

As Mary Kelley outlined in *Learning to Stand and Speak*, women's education proliferated after the American Revolution. In 1789, Massachusetts made elementary schools free for all children, and the first high school for women opened in Philadelphia in 1785. Women's academies were intellectually challenging, and by the 1820s, the number of female students was about equal to that of male students.⁴⁵

Margaret Nash noted that ideas of human rights, evangelical Christianity, and Enlightenment philosophy combined to create wide support for women's education in the early Republic. Class and race kept more Americans from educational opportunities than did gender. Emma Willard opened Troy Female Seminary in Troy, New York, in 1819. Zilpah Grant and Mary Lyon took over Ipswich Female Seminary in Massachusetts in 1828; Wheaton, Mount Holyoke, and Oberlin College were later patterned after this seminary. By midcentury, many of these colleges proliferated as normal schools, training young women as teachers for common schools all across the country.⁴⁶

In some cases, women's education worked to reinforce the role of women as subservient to men. In other cases, it led women to think more widely and deeply about their own positions, challenging their traditional roles as keepers of home and family. Catherine Beecher, sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe, worked tirelessly to promote women as teachers and also helped professionalize women's work within the home. She strongly opposed the early woman's rights movement, however. Susan B. Anthony, on the other hand, used her teaching position to argue for the equality of women within the teaching profession and to launch her own career as a woman's rights lecturer. Lucy Stone's experience epitomized the variety of perspectives that formal education offered to young women in this period. In July 1839, at age 21, she left after one term at Mount Holyoke, disillusioned with the limits of single-sex education: "I abhor woman schools and Negro pews, and for the same reason," she later wrote. "Only let females be educated in the same manner and with equal advantages that males have, and, as everything seeks its level, I would risk but we would find our 'appropriate sphere.'" She found her next year at Wesleyan Academy in Wilbraham, Massachusetts, much more congenial. There, the literary society voted by a large majority "that ladies ought to mingle in politics, go to Congress, etc. etc." From 1843 to 1847, Stone attended the biracial Oberlin College, the first college institution in the United States to grant degrees to women on the same terms as men. Alfred University and St. Lawrence University later became the first coeducational colleges in New York State.⁴⁷

New developments in health, nutrition, and medical education also affected women. Phrenology (reading bumps on the head), Sylvester Graham's ideas of health and nutrition (including eating whole foods, drinking water, and limiting sexual activity), hydropathy (treating disease with cold water and exercise), homeopathy, and dress reform all attracted woman's rights advocates. So did the study of more traditional medicine: in 1837, for example, Mary Gove Nichols began her famous lectures on woman's physiology, delivered to audiences of women alone; Paulina Wright Davis began to lecture to women on anatomy

⁴⁵ Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

⁴⁶ Margaret Nash, *Women's Education in the United States, 1780-1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Keith Melder, *Beginnings of Sisterhood* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 20-22.

⁴⁷ Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catherine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976); Kathleen Barry, *Susan B. Anthony: A Biography of a Singular Feminist* (New York: New York University Press, 1988); Million, *Woman's Voice, Woman's Place*.

and physiology in 1844; and Elizabeth Blackwell graduated from Geneva Medical College, the first woman to do so, on July 23, 1848, just three days after the Seneca Falls convention.⁴⁸

Less formal educational opportunities, such as literary debating societies, parlor discussions, popular literature, newspapers, and histories became channels for women's education, as well. While many of this work emphasized women as moral and obedient, much of it also presented images of women as strong individuals. Margaret Fuller, for example, heard a lecture on woman's rights from John Neal in Providence, Rhode Island, in the late 1830s. When she moved to Boston, she entered the circle of Transcendentalists associated with Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Parker; she edited the newspaper, *The Dial*; and she conducted "conversations" for women on such topics as Greek mythology, art, culture, and women and life. From these discussions emerged *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, published in 1844. In 1845, Fuller moved to New York City to work as the first woman journalist for the *New York Tribune*. Also presenting women as complex and independent individuals during this period was Lydia Maria Child, who published *The History of the Condition of Women, in Various Ages and Nations* (1835).⁴⁹

Religion

In the period between the Revolution and the Civil War, the United States was overwhelmingly a Protestant country. In the late eighteenth century, the largest Protestant denominations were Presbyterians, centered in Pennsylvania and farther south, and Congregationalists, centered in New England. Both groups espoused a Calvinist theology, believing that humans were inherently sinful and that God had determined the fate of every individual at the beginning of time. This doctrine of predestination meant that people had no free will, nor could they earn their salvation by good works. By midcentury, however, Baptists and Methodists—with their theological emphasis on individual conscience and personal salvation began to make inroads in Virginia, Rhode Island, and elsewhere. By 1860, the Methodists and Baptists were the largest Protestant groups.

Under the influence of religious revivals, Americans in the early nineteenth century experienced a resurgence of religious commitment, and they were particularly drawn to those denominations (especially Baptists and Methodists) that emphasized individual conscience and free will. Beginning in 1801 in Cane Ridge, Kentucky, a series of religious revivals swept through the country. Known as the Second Great Awakening (the first had occurred in the mid-eighteenth century), thousands of people converted to Protestant Christianity as a result of these revivals. Because the very nature of the conversion experience encompassed the idea that God desired salvation—heaven rather than hell—for every human being, converts tended to choose those denominations that emphasized some measure of individual choice.

In the Northeast, the most famous religious revivals began in the 1820s with Charles Grandison Finney, whose work in New York State revitalized Christianity in this area. Using his "new measures," Finney brought religion to the "rising generation" and introduced new

⁴⁸ Jane B. Donegan, *Hydropathic Highway to Health: Women and Water-Cure in Antebellum America* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986); Gayle V. Fischer, *Pantaloon and Power: A Nineteenth-Century Dress Reform in the United States* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2001); Jean L. Silver-Isenstadt, *Shameless: The Visionary Life of Mary Gove Nichols* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:94.

⁴⁹ Charles Capper, *Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic Life: The Public Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Lydia Maria Child, *The History of the Condition of Women, in Various Ages and Nations* (Boston: John Allen, 1835). Elizabeth Cady Stanton modeled her own "conversations" in Seneca Falls on Fuller's discussions in Boston.

revival techniques, including the “anxious bench,” where potential converts would receive special and intense attention at the front of the congregation from the revivalist himself. Finney also allowed women to pray in public. When criticized, he defended himself by saying that women were already praying in public assemblies before he began his work, and he merely allowed them to continue.

One effect of revivals, then, was to promote women's public activism. In September 1853, women's rights advocate Antoinette Brown, graduate of Oberlin College, became the first woman to be officially installed as minister of a mainstream European American church, the Congregational Church in South Butler, New York. Reverend Luther Lee, the same Wesleyan Methodist minister who had officiated at the opening of the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls, presided over the ceremony. Brown's experience was unusual, however, since few organized religious groups allowed women to be ordained. Most religious authorities continued to promote male authority in family, church, and community. They approved of the suffering of women in childbirth, for example, because they believed in the biblical story that Eve had introduced Adam to the knowledge of evil.

Early women's rights leaders tended to come neither from Calvinists nor from revivalist, free will advocates but from a third group. These thinkers emphasized the inherent goodness of human beings, downplayed or rejected the Christian idea of salvation through Christ's death on the cross, viewed the Bible as one manifestation of God's word but not the only one, and emphasized continuing revelation, that is, the primacy of the individual conscience and the importance of God's ongoing dialogue with individuals. Unitarians, Universalists, free (meaning nondenominational) churches, Congregational Friends (formed in 1848 from primarily reform-minded Quakers), Spiritualists (who emerged as a distinct group in 1848, promoted in part by families affiliated with the Seneca Falls convention, including Amy and Isaac Post), some Baptists, and some Congregationalists represented these idealistic thinkers.

Congregational Friends (later called the Progressive Friends and the Friends of Human Progress) were especially important. Immediately after the Seneca Falls convention, these groups held meetings that incorporated woman's rights values—at Waterloo in September 1848; Farmington, New York, in October 1848; Green Plain, Ohio, in 1849; and Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, in 1853. In New York State, this group met annually through the 1870s at Junius Monthly Meeting in Waterloo.

Some women's rights activists openly rejected religion. Frances Wright—English-born advocate for woman's rights, abolitionism, working men's rights, and utopian communities—considered herself a free thinker, as did legal reformer Ernestine Rose. So important was Frances Wright as a model for early women's rights advocates that her image appeared as the frontispiece of Stanton, Anthony, and Gage's *History of Woman Suffrage*.

Several other new religious groups also emerged during this period. The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, organized in Philadelphia in 1787, and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, founded in New York City in 1796, became nationally important African American institutions. These large black churches did not generally encourage female ministers, but in 1819, Bishop Richard Allen of the AME Church authorized Jarena Lee, born in Cape May, New Jersey, as the first female AME preacher. Jarena Lee gave thousands of sermons across the country. “The Lord,” she said, “was pleased to give me light and liberty among the people.” One year, she traveled 2,325 miles and gave 178 sermons. In 1836, she published the first edition of her autobiography. In Boston, beginning in the late 1820s, Maria W. Stewart spoke in the African Church in Boston on spiritual issues as well as political ones.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Sue Houchins, ed., *Spiritual Narratives by Maria W. Stewart, Jarena Lee, Julia A. J. Foote, Virginia W. Broughton*, Schomburg Library of Nineteenth Century Black Women Writers (New York: Oxford

Mormons and Seventh-day Adventists—two of the world's fastest-growing religious bodies in the twentieth century—emerged in upstate New York before the Civil War. Although Mormons emphasized male dominance, the church became an early supporter of woman suffrage. When Mormons migrated to Utah, they established polygamy. Wishing to preserve that institution, Utah became, in 1896, one of the first states to allow women to vote. Adventists formally organized after the predicted end of the world failed to materialize in 1843. They embodied many of the reform values of the 1840s, including dietary reforms such as vegetarianism, and they attracted a large following in Seneca Falls. Ellen G. White arose as a major Adventist leader in the mid-nineteenth century, publishing her *Review and Herald* in Rochester from 1852 to 1855.⁵¹

Signers of the Declaration of Sentiments at the Seneca Falls convention reflected the demographic characteristics of their era. Only one known signer, Susan Quinn, came from a Catholic background. Her father, Patrick Quinn, had been a founder of the Catholic Church in Seneca Falls but had later affiliated with Trinity Episcopal Church in Seneca Falls. While the largest number of signers were Quaker (about twenty-five), the next largest were Episcopalian (ten). Other signers were Methodist or Wesleyan Methodist, with one Baptist.

Benevolent reform

Women were key to a whole series of benevolent reform organizations that emerged in the 1810s and 1820s. They brought communities across the country, including Seneca Falls and Waterloo, into a national dialogue based on Protestant Christian beliefs. The American Bible Society, American Missionary Society, American Home Missionary Society, and American Sunday School Union organized to bring the country and the world—across classes, races, and sexes—into a unified Protestant Christian culture. In upstate New York, groups such as the Western Sunday School Union and the Western Female Missionary Society developed cooperative alliances among several Protestant denominations (notably Presbyterian and Congregational), while other groups formed parallel groups within their own denominations. Early orphanages, such as the Colored Orphanage in New York City, were almost always the work of women, although men usually formed the official boards of trustees. Women met weekly to care for the poor, including orphans, and widows.

In the process of their work, these female benevolent reformers created powerful networks, and they learned how to organize, speak, write, present programs, and raise money. Most women benevolent reformers, however, continued to function within “women’s sphere,” focusing on caretaking tasks and appealing to moral values that clearly reinforced women’s traditional roles. They were involved in what some historians have called “conservative reform” movements. While they pushed the envelope of traditional female behavior, they did so in ways that maintained rather than challenged the existing social order.

In 1978, Barbara Berg, who studied benevolent reform organizations in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, argued that these organizations formed the basis for the emergence of the early woman’s rights movement, which was, in turn, primarily urban in origin. She suggested that female benevolent reform movements helped create an alternative consciousness, one that challenged the dominant popular-culture ideology (that women

University Press, 1988).

⁵¹ Carol Cornwall Madsen, *Battle for the Ballot: Essays on Woman Suffrage in Utah, 1870–1896*; David Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets: Millerites and Dissenting Religion in Upstate New York, 1800–1850* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985); David Rowe, *God’s Strange Work: William Miller and the end of the World* (New York: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008).

were dependant, homebound people, reliant on husbands and fathers for access to the world's goods) and thus formed the origins of American feminism itself.⁵²

Anne Boylan advanced an alternative thesis, also based on extensive work on women's organizations in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. Most women who focused their benevolent reform activities on Sunday schools, orphan asylums, and poor relief in urban areas were not at the cutting edge of early woman's rights activism, Boylan found. In fact, as Nancy Hewitt and Judith Wellman have argued, those most active in early woman's rights organizing were not based primarily in major urban centers. In fact, they revealed that early woman's rights activists—those who became organizers rather than simply sympathizers—had agrarian rather than urban roots.⁵³

Barbara Berg's most powerful arguments focused not on missionary societies or orphanages, but on the Female Moral Reform Society. The Female Moral Reform Society was quite different in purpose and method from orphanages, missionary societies, and poor relief organizations. As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg noted, the Female Moral Reform Society worked to protect prostitutes from male exploitation, and its members engaged in such direct action as noting the names of male customers on key street corners. Moral reformers advocated education, employment, and better pay for women not as an issue of equal rights but as an alternative to prostitution. To make their case, however, they sometimes made common cause with radical woman's rights advocates. In January 1848, for example, the *New York Tribune* estimated that there were ten thousand "wretched victims of libertine depravity" in New York City alone, with one thousand new victims each year and an average life span of five years. Faced with such odds, women's political power seemed a small price to pay. As the *Tribune* noted, "[T]he blackest and most injurious crime short of murder that can be committed is allowed to pass unpunished, in defiance of yearly petition and remonstrance, because Political Power is vested entirely in men." Not only did Berg look at an atypical reform group; she also failed to recognize, Daniel S. Wright noted, that moral reformers had strong roots in rural communities.⁵⁴

Along with the Female Moral Reform society, the temperance movement became a bridge between benevolent reform and more radical challenges to existing institutions, as Lori Ginzberg and others have argued. While benevolent reformers worked to integrate the poor and helpless into the existing social order, both temperance and moral reform movements focused on individuals, promoting opportunities for personal growth and challenging male-dominated institutions—brothels, taverns, and governments—that allowed both prostitution and the sale of liquor.⁵⁵

⁵² Barbara Berg, *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism, The Woman and the City, 1800–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

⁵³ Ann M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797–1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Nancy A. Hewitt, "Feminist Friends: Agrarian Quakers and the Emergence of Woman's Rights in America," *Feminist Studies* 12, no. 1 (1986): 27–50; Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822–1872* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984); Judith Wellman, "The Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention: A Study of Social Networks," *Journal of Women's History* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 9–37.

⁵⁴ *New York Tribune*, January 29, 1848; Carroll Smith Rosenberg, "Beauty, the Beast, and the Militant Woman: A Case Study in Sex Roles and Social Stress in Jacksonian America," *American Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (October 1971), 562–84; Daniel S. Wright, *"The First Causes to Our Sex": The Female Moral Reform Movement in the Antebellum Northeast, 1834–1848* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁵⁵ Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1992).

The teetotal temperance movement hit Seneca Falls and central New York in the early 1840s and formed an important basis for woman's activism. When Elizabeth Cady Stanton gave her first speech at a temperance meeting in Seneca Falls in 1841 or 1842, she infused it, she wrote, with "a homeopathic dose of woman's rights." By spring 1842, eight hundred men and seven hundred women (more than 37 percent of the town's population), plus children in the Juvenile Temperance Society, had joined the temperance movement in Seneca Falls. In 1842, women in Elbridge, New York, just east of Seneca Falls, made explicit the connection between temperance and woman's rights. "Temperance husbands or none," they toasted. "THE YOUNG ME WHO REFUSE TO SIGN THE PLEDGE. May they be doomed to a life of single blessedness." Finally, temperance women raised their glasses of cold water to "THE OLD MAIDS," saying, "We glory in our independence, an independence not from necessity, but choice." In 1852, women in New York State formed the Women's State Temperance Society, with Elizabeth Cady Stanton as the first president, after men refused to let women speak in the original statewide organization.⁵⁶

Hannah Darlington, Quaker abolitionist, temperance reformer, and early woman's rights advocate from Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, recalled that

many mixed meetings [with men and women both] were held through the county before 1847. . . . Sidney Peirce, Ann Preston, and myself, each prepared addresses to read at meetings called in such places as the Committee arranged; . . . we addressed many large audiences, some in the daytime and some in the evening, scattered appeals and tracts, and collected names to petitions asking for a law against licensing liquor-stands. . . . We continued active work in our association until the inauguration of the Good Templars movement, in which men and women worked together on terms of equality.⁵⁷

In 1852, Darlington helped organize the first woman's rights convention in Pennsylvania.

Except for temperance and the Female Moral Reform Society, which were not really benevolent organizations at all, the relationship between female benevolent reform organizations and the early woman's rights movement was clearly more complicated than Barbara Berg suggested. Women's rights activism did not follow a linear path. Benevolent reformers did not take the lead in organizing the early women's rights movement, nor were the earliest organizers based in major Eastern urban centers. Instead, small cities and villages in what Theodore Weld called the "back country" provided the most fruitful early network. Participation in benevolent reform had, if anything, a negative impact on early woman's rights leaders. When Lucy Stone threw down her needle and thread, refusing any longer to sew clothes to send a male student to seminary to which she herself could not go, she took a step that resonated with many other women in their commitment to woman's rights.⁵⁸

What remains unclear, however, is the role of urban benevolent reform in creating an audience for the women's movement as it spread beyond its earliest beginnings. It is possible that participation in benevolent reform predisposed women, both urban and rural, to support the woman's rights movement after 1850, when it began to reach beyond its initial core of abolitionists and legal reformers into the larger culture. More detailed research in

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Elizabeth Neall, 26 November [1841], Sydney Howard Gay Papers, Columbia University; *Water Bucket*, March 11, 1842.

⁵⁷ Hannah Darlington to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 6 February 1881; Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:344.

⁵⁸ Million, *Woman's Voice, Woman's Place*, 19.

specific places may allow us to more fully understand the relationship between benevolent reform and woman's rights over time.

Keith Melder viewed moral reform, temperance, and peace activism as part of a "shift from benevolence to reform," and he classed these three movements with antislavery. Two other reforms also proved fertile soil for testing ideas about woman's rights and putting them into practice: utopian communities and legal reform. It was from these three reforms, especially legal reform and antislavery, that the earliest blooms of women's rights would grow.⁵⁹

Utopian Communities

Between the Revolution and the Civil War, Americans in the Northeast and upper Midwest formed about one hundred intentional communities, experimenting with alternatives to religious, economic, and family patterns in the dominant culture. Nationally, among the most important of the intentional communities were those of the Shakers, formed by Mother Ann Lee. Practicing celibacy, they established agricultural villages from Mount Lebanon in New York to Pleasant Hill, Kentucky; the Owenite communities, which followed the ideas of English reformer Robert Owen; Brook Farm and the Northampton Association in New England; the Oneida Community, organized near Utica, New York, by John Humphrey Noyes on the basis of a system called complex marriage; and several communities founded loosely on the principles of French socialist Charles Fourier, who advocated work equality and shared property. Most of these intentional communities included both abolitionists and women's rights advocates, and many of them, although dominated by European Americans, incorporated African American members, such as Shaker Rebecca Jackson and abolitionist-feminist Sojourner Truth, who lived for a time at the Northampton Association in New England.

Some of the signers of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments—including Thomas M'Clintock, Stephen Shear, and George and Margaret Pryor—actively supported the Society for University Inquiry and Reform established on Fourierist principles at Skaneateles, New York, in 1843. While only a very small proportion of reformers ever moved to live in a utopian community, these communitarians did offer a vision of alternative lifestyles, including alternative gender relationships, to people in the dominant culture.⁶⁰

Legal Reform

Scholars have traditionally given abolitionists most of the credit for setting the stage for women's rights. In recent years, however, historians such as Norma Basch, Peggy Rabkin, Elizabeth Warbasse, and Judith Wellman began to point out that legal agitation for a married woman's property act also provided a major source of energy and ideas for the women's rights movement. Without legal reformers, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, women's rights

⁵⁹ Keith Melder, *Beginnings of Sisterhood: The American Woman's Rights Movement, 1800-1850* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977).

⁶⁰ Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); Maren Lockwood Carden, *Oneida: Utopian Community to Modern Corporation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969); Thomas D. Hamm, *God's Government Begun: The Society for Universal Inquiry and Reform, 1842-1846* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

might have remained a branch of radical abolitionism for much longer than it did, rather than emerging as a separate and identifiable movement.⁶¹

Debates about property rights for married women went to the heart of questions of citizenship. What did the Declaration of Independence, with its assertions that “all men are created equal” and that “government derives its just power from the consent of the governed,” really mean? In republican theory, people were entitled to vote if they gave up part of their private resources to support the state, either by defending it as soldiers or paying taxes. If women paid taxes, then, in theory, they should also vote.

In the late eighteenth century, most states tied voting to property ownership. As states increasingly dropped property qualifications for adult white male suffrage in the early nineteenth century, voting (and therefore citizenship rights) became identified less with the natural rights of all citizens and more with race and gender. This shift did not happen, however, without considerable public resistance. New York State offers a case study. Debates over African American suffrage at the 1821 and 1846 constitutional conventions and over the married women's property act, passed in April 1848, were dress rehearsals for later confrontations over women's suffrage.

When New York State revised its constitution in 1821, some argued that voting was a natural right, guaranteed by the Declaration of Independence, with its assurance of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Others believed that government (and therefore voting rights) existed to promote property. Daniel Tompkins, president of the convention, was vehement that “‘Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’—not of property—are set forth in the declaration of independence. Property is not even named.” Conservatives argued otherwise, and they used the question of women to bolster their case. Elisha Williams, major land owner in Waterloo, New York, noted, for example, that, with the exclusion of women (“the better half of the whole human family”), as well as infants, foreigners, paupers, and felons, only one-tenth of the population were “the actual legitimate sovereigns of the state.” “All have lives to be protected; but all living are not, therefore, entitled to become electors. . . . [M]any a female, as well as many a legal infant, is in possession of large estates, but they cannot vote.”⁶²

The 1821 convention abolished property restrictions for adult white male voters but kept them for African American men. Yet the question of voting as a natural right—for women as well as for African Americans and perhaps for Indians as well—would not go away. Abraham Lincoln, who ran for the Illinois state legislature in 1836, noted, “I go for all sharing the privileges of the government . . . who assist in bearing its burthens, . . . admitting all whites to the right of suffrage, who pay taxes or bear arms (by no means excluding females).”⁶³

Debates over a married woman's property act began in New York State in the late 1820s, spurred by passage in 1828 of the *Revised Statutes of the State of New York*. New Yorkers who wanted to protect estates for their wives and daughters had always relied on a system of equity courts to administer trusts. By the 1820s, however, many people viewed

⁶¹ Norma Basch, *In the Eyes of the Law: Women, Marriage, and Property in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), 79–112; Peggy A. Rabkin, *Fathers to Daughters: The Legal Foundations of Female Emancipation* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1980); Elizabeth Bowles Warbasse, *The Changing Legal Rights of Married Women, 1800–1861* (New York: Garland, 1987); Judith Wellman, “Women's Rights, Republicanism, and Revolutionary Rhetoric in Antebellum New York State,” *New York History* (1988).

⁶² Carter and Stone, *Reports*, 235, 278, 248–9, quoted in Wellman, *Road to Seneca Falls*, 140–41.

⁶³ Abraham Lincoln to *Sangamo Journal*, June 13, 1836, in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Roy Basler, ed., 1:48.

equity courts as leftovers from an old feudal system. The *Revised Statutes* limited the power of trusts to such an extent that no one was sure whether married women could actually own property any longer. Because married women's property acts affirmed a separate identity for married women (independent of their husbands and fathers), they challenged the legal system itself, which defined a married man and woman as one person, and that one was the husband. As a girl, Elizabeth Cady Stanton confronted the legality inequality of women in her father's law office. Her father's law students would tease her by reading "all the worst laws they could find, over which I would laugh and cry by turns," she remembered. When she received a new coral necklace and bracelets for Christmas, one of the students teased her by saying that if he were her husband, he could exchange the jewelry for cigars and she "could watch them evaporate in smoke."⁶⁴

The young Elizabeth was not alone in her dismay at women's legal inferiority. In 1829, Frances Wright and Robert Dale Owen advocated the rights of women (including a married woman's property act), African Americans, and working people in *The Free Enquirer*, their New York City reform newspaper. In 1836, Thomas Hertell introduced specific legislation, supported with a petition signed by five women and circulated by Ernestine Rose, a Polish Jewish woman who had just moved to New York City. Rose also lectured on the "Science of Government," including arguments for woman's rights. Introduced unsuccessfully year after year, bills for married woman's property acts generated widespread public debate throughout the state. In the 1840s, Frances Seward, wife of Governor William Henry Seward, lobbied for them, as did Paulina Wright Davis and Elizabeth Cady Stanton herself. Stanton identified married women's property as "the topic of general interest around many fashionable dinner-tables, and at many humble firesides. In this way all phases of the question were touched upon, involving the relations of the sexes, and gradually widening to all human interests—political, religious, civil and social."⁶⁵

Debates over legal rights also raised the issue of voting rights. In 1843, a series of lectures by "Brother Jonathan" published in the *New York Herald* advocated woman's suffrage, as did the *Seneca Observer* in Seneca Falls, which noted that "the right of voting should be extended to females in common with males, and . . . it is a violation of the great doctrine of equal rights that such is not the case."⁶⁶

In 1846, discussion of women's rights became a major focus of the New York State constitutional convention. Ansel Bascom, delegate from Seneca Falls, promoted the cause. Although the convention passed a married woman's property act, it reversed itself upon the appeal of Charles O'Connor (a bachelor), who argued that this act was "more important than any which had been adopted—perhaps than all the rest of the constitution. If there was any thing in our institutions that ought not to be touched by the stern hand of the *reformer*, it was the sacred ordinance of marriage."⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Stanton, *Eighty Years*, 21.

⁶⁵ Paul S. Boyer, "Fanny Wright," in *Notable American Women, 1607–1950*, eds. Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press / Harvard University Press, 1971), 3:678; Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:51–52.

⁶⁶ *Observer* quoted in *Seneca Falls Democrat*, September 14, 1843; *New York Herald*, January 25, 1843, noted in Elizabeth Warbasse, "Legal Status of Women from Blackstone to 1848," paper given at Seneca Falls Women's History Conference, June, 1979.

⁶⁷ Bishop and Attree, *Report*, 1057–60. A slightly different version of O'Connor's speech appeared in Charles Z. Lincoln, *The Constitutional History of New York*, vol. 2, 1822–1894 (Rochester, New York: Lawyers Co-operative Publishing Company, 1906), 112–13.

Arguments for voting rights based on legal rights echoed language derived from the American Revolution and the Declaration of Independence. Six women from Depauville, in New York State's Jefferson County—Eleanor Vincent, Lydia A. Williams, Lydia Osborn, Susan Ormsby, Amy Ormsby, and Anna Bishop—argued, for example, that “that all governments must derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.” Moreover, “[t]he present government of this state,” they asserted,

has widely departed from the true democratic principles upon which all just governments must be based by denying to the female portion of the community the right of suffrage . . . and by imposing upon them burdens of taxation . . . without admitting them the right of representation. . . . Your Memorialists therefore ask your honorable body . . . to extend to women equal . . . civil and political rights with men.

Women's rights, they noted, were not new. They belonged by inheritance to women as citizens of the State of New York.⁶⁸

Others took up the cause. In Syracuse, Unitarian minister Samuel J. May argued in November 1846 that it was “all unequal, all unrighteous—this utter annihilation, politically considered, of more than one-half the whole community.” “I fain would hope,” he concluded, “that, when next the people frame a constitution for this state, the stupendous fact will not be overlooked *that more than one-half of our population are females, to whom equal rights and equal privileges ought to be accorded.*”⁶⁹

Elisha P. Hurlbut, New York City lawyer, took the argument one step further in *Essays on Human Rights, and Their Political Guaranties*. “Woman's rights are as sacred to the law as man's,” he asserted, and “her concern with government is as great and important as his own.” “There seems to be no escape from the claims of woman to the full rights of citizenship,” he concluded. If her nature is the same as man's (and Hurlbut believed that it was), then “she can claim to exercise the elective franchise of common right.” If her nature was different, then men “cannot properly represent her. . . . This would entitle women not only to vote, but by their votes to elect a separate branch of the Legislature.” As Ann Gordon noted, at the Seneca Falls convention, “The authors of the Declaration [of Sentiments] followed Hurlbut in all their examples.”⁷⁰

In 1847, a pamphlet written in Ogdensburg, New York, grounded arguments for women's property and voting rights in the Declaration of Independence:

THAT ALL ARE CREATED FREE AND EQUAL; THAT THEY ARE ENDOWED BY THEIR CREATOR WITH CERTAIN UNALIENABLE RIGHTS; THAT AMONG THESE ARE LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS—is acknowledged to be the fundamental doctrine upon which this Republic is

⁶⁸ Petition dated August 8, 1846, in Bishop and Attree, *Report*, 646. A petition “numerously and respectably signed by some of the first citizens of Albany” was referred to the committee on the elective franchise on July 11. Another from women in Covington, Wyoming County, was received on August 27. Other petitions came from Bishop and Attree, 284, 763. For a detailed study of the women who signed this Jefferson County petition, see Ginzberg, *Untidy Origins*.

⁶⁹ Samuel J. May, “Rights and Condition of Women,” in *Woman's Rights Tract No. 1: Commensurate with her capacities and obligations, are Woman's Rights* (Syracuse, New York: N.M.D. Lathrop, 1853), 1–2, 13.

⁷⁰ Elisha P. Hurlbut, *Essays on Human Rights, and Their Political Guaranties* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1848), 117, 123; *Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, vol. 1, *In the School of Anti-Slavery, 1840 to 1866*, ed. Ann D. Gordon (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

founded. [This idea] is freedom's golden rule. . . . None should ever be allowed to restrict its universality. Women, as well as men, are entitled to the full enjoyment of its practical blessings.⁷¹

In the spring of 1848, yet another married woman's property bill came before the legislature. Again, proponents used the Declaration of Independence as a major argument for woman's rights. In March 1848, forty-four married women from Genesee and Wyoming counties sent a sarcastically worded petition in support of the proposed law. Like earlier appeals, this one, too, reflected the language of the Declaration of Independence:

That your Declaration of Independence declares, that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. And as women have never consented to, been represented in, or recognized by this government, it is evident that in justice no allegiance can be claimed from them.

Your laws after depriving us of property, of the means of acquiring it, and even of individuality, require the same obedience from us as from free citizens.

We therefore think, common justice and humanity would dictate, that when you class us and our privileges with those of idiots, and lunatics, you should do the same with regard to our responsibilities; and as our husbands assume responsibility for our debts and trespasses, they should also for our misdemeanors and crimes; for justice can never hold lunatics, idiots, infants, or married women, (as the law now is,) accountable for their conduct.

When women are allowed the privilege of rational and accountable beings, it will be soon enough to expect from them the duties of such.

Our numerous and yearly petitions for this most desirable object having been disregarded, we now ask your august body, to abolish all laws which hold married women more accountable for their acts than infants, idiots, and lunatics.⁷²

A month later, in April 1848, the legislature passed New York State's first married woman's property act. Arguments used to support the married women's property act became direct models for arguments used for women's rights. Passage of the act inspired women to take "some onward step," as Elizabeth Cady Stanton remembered, on their own behalf. That step would be the Seneca Falls women's rights convention.

Antislavery

Legal reform in New York State provided intellectual arguments for women's rights, but the abolitionist movement gave women specific organizing experience and a major support network. In fact, women associated with the American Anti-Slavery Society became the most outspoken early advocates for woman's rights.

⁷¹ [John Fine?], *Lecture Delivered Before the Ogdensburgh Lyceum, on the Political Rights of Women* (Ogdensburgh, New York: Tyler and James, n.d.), 2–3. John Fine ran against Daniel Cady, Stanton's father, in the election for judge of the New York State Supreme Court in 1847. Cady won.

⁷² *New York Assembly Documents*, March 15, 1848, No. 129, 1–2; George Geddes to Matilda Joslyn Gage, in Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:65. For a collective biography of women who signed this petition, see Carolyn Wright-Dauenhauer, "With All My Worldly Goods I Thee Endow: The Married Women's Property Act of 1848 and Its Petitioners from Darien and Covington," unpublished paper, 1984, State University of New York at Oswego; *New York Assembly Documents*, March 15, 1848, No. 129, 1–2.

Nineteenth century woman's rights activists identified the importance of the antislavery movement as a context for woman's rights movement, and historians continued to repeat the abolitionist-to-women's-rights-activist storyline into the twenty-first century. In the past years, however, our understanding of the link between the two movements began to shift in significant ways. In terms of the woman's rights movement as a whole, historians began to emphasize not only how abolitionism shaped the woman's rights movement (in terms of ideology, methods, and support networks) but also how early woman's rights activists shaped abolitionism. Scholars also have a deeper understanding of the importance of political abolitionists, as well as members of the American Anti-Slavery Society, in supporting women's rights. In terms of people, Lucretia Mott and the Grimké sisters remain leading figures for the 1830s and 1840s, but we have new appreciation for the significance of Abby Kelley Foster as well as for the work of Lucy Stone, Elizabeth M'Clintock, Amy Post, and others. We understand more completely the critical role that Quakers played, not only at Seneca Falls but in the woman's movement as a whole. Reform Quakers in upstate New York, southeastern Pennsylvania, New York City, and Ohio associated with the American Anti-Slavery Society assume particular importance in these new studies. In terms of geographic place, scholars are beginning to realize the extent to which woman's rights ideas had their roots in smaller communities across the northeast and the power of their connections with women in Western Europe.

All of these themes come together to help us understand the origins of the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention. Key people who attended the Seneca Falls convention were profoundly influenced by abolitionism. Many of them had been involved from the very beginning of the organized American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833. They had worked with antislavery societies, sent antislavery petitions, heard antislavery lectures, read antislavery literature, and in some cases voted for antislavery political parties.

Two early abolitionists and woman's rights advocates—precursors to the organized abolitionist movement itself—were the first women to speak in public in the United States. The first of these speakers was Frances Wright, British-born abolitionist, legal reformer, and advocate for working people. While her lithograph graced the frontispiece of the *History of Woman Suffrage* in 1882, Wright contributed more explicitly to the organized Working Man's Party in New York City and the movement for utopian communities (with her support for Robert Dale Owen's New Harmony in Indiana and her own development of Nashoba, an antislavery community in Tennessee) than she did to formal antislavery or woman's rights organizations. The second speaker was Maria W. Stewart. As a friend of David Walker, whose *Appeal: To the Coloured Citizens of the World* (1829) startled readers with its attacks on slavery and racism, Stewart was at the very center not only of antislavery efforts but also of leadership for the rights of free people of color and women. In her farewell address in Boston before she moved to Brooklyn, New York, in 1833, she talked about her work as an African American leader and as a woman: "It is not the color of the skin that makes the man or the woman but the principle formed in the soul," she said. She is generally credited with being the first American-born woman to speak in public about political and woman's rights issues (as opposed to spiritual ones), but in fact Native American women had given public speeches, as had Anne Hutchinson almost two hundred years earlier.⁷³

Both Wright and Stewart spoke in the context of growing public resistance to slavery. In 1831, a rebellion of enslaved people led by Nat Turner in Virginia paralleled another rebellion in Boston, that of twenty-five-year-old abolitionist editor William Lloyd Garrison, who on January 1, 1831, published the first issue of *The Liberator*. In it, he announced that,

⁷³ *David Walker's Appeal*, introduction by Sean Wilentz (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995); Marilyn Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart: America's First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

on the subject of slavery, "I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch. AND I WILL BE HEARD." African American women in Boston led a fund-raising effort on behalf of the *Liberator*, and the core of the *Liberator's* 500 subscribers its first year were black.⁷⁴

In 1833, the New England Anti-Slavery Society, led by Garrison in Boston, had three agents in the field and thousands of local members. Abolitionists in New York City had also begun to organize, with high-profile supporters including Arthur and Lewis Tappan, wealthy merchants; Quaker bookseller Isaac Hopper; and Lydia Maria Child, well-known author. Philadelphia Quakers and African Americans formed a third center of antislavery sentiment. December 4–6, 1833, that sixty-three delegates (all male) from ten states met at the Adelphia Building in Philadelphia to form the American Anti-Slavery Society. At this meeting, William Lloyd Garrison drafted a Declaration of Sentiments. Referring to the Declaration of Independence, adopted in Philadelphia fifty-seven years earlier, he noted that "our enterprise [completes that of the founding fathers and] "as far transcends theirs, as moral truth does physical force." Although only men signed this Declaration of Sentiments, Lucretia Mott and her sister Martha Wright (both of whom later attended the Seneca Falls convention) and five other Quaker women were present at the meeting. Mott spoke officially three times, once when she suggested that delegates transpose Garrison's original phrase, that "we plant ourselves upon the truths of Divine Revelation and the Declaration of Independence as upon the EVERLASTING ROCK," to read "we plant ourselves upon the truths of the Declaration of Independence and Divine Revelation as upon the EVERLASTING ROCK." James Miller McKim, a young Presbyterian divinity student in the assembly, turned around to "see what woman was there who knew what the word 'transpose' meant." When delegates were finally invited to sign the declaration, Mott's voice rang out, "James, put down thy name!"⁷⁵

Three days later, on December 9, 1833, Mott and about thirty other Philadelphia women, both black and white, founded the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, with Alexander Crummell, an African American minister, as their presiding officer—the first and only time they asked a man to preside. Most of the women were Quakers, but a few were Presbyterian or Unitarian, including Abba Alcott, mother of Louisa May Alcott. Among the founding members were several African American women, including three daughters of wealthy sailmaker James Forten, as well as Sarah McCrummel and Quaker Grace Bustill Douglass. Sarah Mapps Douglass, a schoolmistress and daughter of Grace Douglass, later joined. Janice Sumler-Lewis, Julie Winch, and Margaret Hope Bacon have detailed the importance of the prominent African American Forten and Purvis families in this organization.⁷⁶

The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society held fairs to raise money, promoted the Underground Railroad, supported black schools, and sent antislavery petitions to Congress. As Margaret Hope Bacon, Lucretia Mott's biographer, noted, "It has been correctly called

⁷⁴ Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 112.

⁷⁵ Mayer, *All on Fire*, 176; Margaret Hope Bacon, *Valiant Friend: The Life of Lucretia Mott* (New York: Walker and Company, 1980), 55–57; Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:324–33.

⁷⁶ Martha Wright to David Wright, 5 and 7 December 1833, Garrison Family Papers, Smith College; Bacon, *Valiant Friend*, 58–60; Julie Winch, *A Gentleman Man of Color: The Life of James Forten* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 256–58, 275–78; Janice Sumler-Lewis, "The Forten-Purvis Women of Philadelphia and the American Anti-Slavery Crusade," *Journal of Negro History* 66 (1981–82).

one of the first women's political groups. Through it, women learned to exercise talents they did not know they possessed. It rapidly became the springboard for the woman's rights movement."⁷⁷

But the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society was not the only springboard for the early woman's rights movement. Women organized as many as two hundred female antislavery societies (as well as dual-sex societies) in many parts of Pennsylvania, New England, New York, and the Midwest. Beth A. Salerno, Deborah Van Broekhoven, Nancy Hewitt, Judith Wellman, Julie Roy Jeffrey, and Susan Zaeske have shown that for Rhode Island, central New York, and the North as a whole, women abolitionists in local communities signed antislavery petitions, organized antislavery fairs and sewing circles, boycotted slave-grown goods, sponsored lectures, sold newspapers, supported African American schools, and sheltered freedom seekers. As Salerno suggested in *Sister Societies: Women's Antislavery Organizations in Antebellum America*:

The history of these "sister societies" makes clear the power of association. Female antislavery societies gave women a structure in which to meet regularly, educate themselves, stay motivated, and pool their efforts. By organizing independently from men, they were able to serve as officers, write and vote on resolutions, and run public meetings, building their skills and confidence. Meeting together strengthened women's local friendships and linked them to both regional and national networks.⁷⁸

Moreover, the antislavery petition movement allowed white and free black women "to assert a modified form of citizenship," as Susan Zaeske argued, transforming women's identity "from that of subjects to that of citizens." Petitioning arguably became the single largest coordinated effort of American women before the Civil War. Between 1831 and 1863, as Zaeske noted, women affixed about three million signatures to antislavery petitions. In New York State, 60 percent of antislavery petitions sent between 1837 and 1841 carried the names of women, some on petitions signed only by women and others on petitions signed by women and men together. Frequently, one person collected all the petitions from a local area to be sent to Congress together (often literally pinned together). In the Boston area in 1837, for example, Mary Weston compiled 248 petitions from Weymouth and 130 from Braintree. "I labored like a dog to get them [ready]," she wrote.⁷⁹

Women's antislavery societies were often organized across lines of race, class, and religion. Harriet Martineau described the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society:

⁷⁷ Bacon, *Valiant Friend*, 61.

⁷⁸ Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Deborah Van Broekhoven, *The Devotion of These Women: Rhode Island in the Antislavery Network* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002); Judith Wellman, "Women and Radical Reform in Antebellum Upstate New York: A Profile of Grass Roots Female Abolitionists," in *Clio Was a Woman: Studies in the History of American Women*, ed. Mabel E. Deutrich and Virginia C. Purdy (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1980); Beth A. Salerno, *Sister Societies: Women's Antislavery Organizations in Antebellum America* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), 4; Susan Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, and Women's Political Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

⁷⁹ Susan Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship*, 1–2; Mary Weston to Deborah Weston, 22 January 1837, Chapman-Weston Papers, Boston Public Library, quoted in Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army of Abolitionism*; Van Broekhoven, *The Devotion of These Women*; Wellman, "Women and Radical Reform in Antebellum Upstate New York"; Salerno, *Sister Societies*.

The Female Anti-Slavery Society in Boston is composed of women of every rank, and every religious sect, as well as of all complexions. The president is a Presbyterian; the chief secretary is a Unitarian; and among the other officers and members may be found Quakers, Episcopalians, Methodists, and Swedenborgians. All sectarian jealousy is lost in the great cause; and these women have, from the first day of their association, preserved, not only harmony, but strong mutual affection, while differing on matters of opinion as freely and almost as widely as if they had kept within the bosom of their respective sects.⁸⁰

Sometimes, such alliances were fired in the crucible of mob violence. When British abolitionist George Thompson visited Boston in 1836, he reported that one worker's wife, warned of the possibility of attack during an upcoming antislavery meeting, leaned on her broom, thought a moment, and then said, "I have often wished and asked that I might be able to do something for the slaves; and it seems to me that this is the very time and the very way. You will see me at the meeting and I will keep a prayerful mind, as I am about my work, till then."⁸¹

Such effective grassroots organizing around the ideal of equality made the step from abolitionism into woman's rights seem almost inevitable. Yet it was not. As several scholars have shown, sisterhood might have been powerful, but it did not come naturally, easily, or often at all within many abolitionist organizations. Debra Gold Hansen pointed out that the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society split over ideological and class differences, even though members shared a core of woman's rights ideals. Other scholars, notably Shirley Yee, have emphasized that racism and different goals made it difficult to create a sisterhood between black and white women abolitionists.⁸²

Nancy Hewitt's work on abolitionist women in Rochester suggests a model of three types of abolitionists that might explain these differences in women's groups nationally. Some abolitionists in Rochester were radical egalitarians—in Hewitt's term, *ultraists*—who worked for the rights of free people of color, created biracial organizations, and attracted some (by no means all) Quakers, Congregationalists, and Unitarians. It was this group, not abolitionists as a whole, who became early woman's rights advocates. Members of this group attended the Seneca Falls convention and helped organize the second woman's rights convention in Rochester, two weeks after Seneca Falls. A second group, which Hewitt calls *perfectionists*, were influenced by religious revivals and worked for abolitionism but did not generally take leadership roles in the early woman's rights movements. A third group of women worked in benevolent reform, maintaining existing class and gender roles.⁸³

In the mid-1830s, southern abolitionists Sarah and Angelina Grimké became the center of debates about women's rights. Fleeing their slave-owning family in South Carolina, the Grimké sisters became Quakers in Philadelphia in the late 1820s. In 1836, William Lloyd Garrison published a letter from Angelina to the *Liberator*. That same year, they became the

⁸⁰ Harriet Martineau, *The Martyr Age of the United States* (Boston: Weeks, Jordan, 1839). Reprinted in Deborah Anna Logan, ed., *Writings on Slavery and the American Civil War* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), 44–80, quoted in *Women and Social Movements* Web site.

⁸¹ Martineau, *Martyr Age*. Reprinted in Logan, ed., *Writings on Slavery and the American Civil War*, 44–80.

⁸² Debra Gold Hansen, *Strained Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993); Shirley Yee, *Black Women Activists: A Study in Activism, 1828–1860*, (Nashville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 111.

⁸³ Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822–1872* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984).

only women among a group of seventy abolitionist agents trained by Theodore Weld to carry the antislavery message across the Northeast. Sent to speak to women's groups, they soon found themselves speaking to "promiscuous audiences," that is, groups of women and men together. In 1837, encouraged by Henry Brewster Stanton, Angelina Grimké became the first woman to speak before the Massachusetts legislature. She spoke in support of antislavery petitions signed by women, some of the thousands sent by women from across the North both to Congress and to state legislatures in a massive campaign of grassroots women's activism. Outraged because Grimké spoke in public, Congregational clergy in Massachusetts sent a pastoral letter to all Congregational churches in New England denouncing women's public speaking. Sarah Grimké responded with *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman*, an essay that proved a turning point in many women's transition from abolitionism to woman's rights. "Men and women were CREATED EQUAL," she asserted; "they are both moral and accountable beings, and whatever is *right* for man to do, is *right* for woman."⁸⁴

In the 1830s, women abolitionists held three national antislavery conventions, in New York City (1837) and Philadelphia (1838 and 1839) and revealed the widespread roots of women's antislavery organizing. European American and African American delegates to the New York City meeting included twenty-nine women from New York State, twenty-two from Massachusetts, twenty-two from Pennsylvania, three from Rhode Island, and two each from New Hampshire and Ohio. One hundred and three women were listed as corresponding members. The New York convention published *An Appeal to the Women of the Nominally Free States*, by Angelina Grimké, and *An Address to the Free Colored People of the United States*, by Sarah Grimké.⁸⁵

The convention highlighted the leadership role of women. Convention members agreed that all Americans—women as well as men, Northerners as well as Southerners—were implicated both in American slavery and racial prejudice. Women in the North therefore had both a right and a responsibility to work for change. Angelina Grimké's *Appeal to the Women of the Nominally Free States* argued that women have "*human rights and human responsibilities*" and "*all moral beings have essentially the same rights and the same duties, whether they be male or female.*" "Are we aliens because we are women?" she asked. "Are we bereft of citizenship because we are the *mothers, wives, and daughters* of a mighty people? Have women no country—no interest staked in public weal—no liabilities in common-peril—no partnership in a nation's guilt and shame?"⁸⁶

In May 1838, 208 delegates and 73 corresponding members from eight states (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode

⁸⁴ The most important recent works on the Grimké sisters are Gerda Lerner, *Grimké Sisters of South Carolina* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967); Gerda Lerner, *The Feminist Thought of Sarah Grimké* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Mark Perry, *Lift Up Thy Voice: The Grimké Family's Journey from Slaveholders to Civil Rights Leaders* (New York: Viking, 2001); and Larry Ceplair, *The Public Years of Sarah and Angelina Grimké: Selected Writings, 1835–1839* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). Sarah Grimké, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838), quoted in Ceplair, 213. For Henry B. Stanton's encouragement of the Grimké sisters to speak before the Massachusetts legislature, see Wellman, *Road to Seneca Falls*, 51.

⁸⁵ *Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, Held in the City of New-York, May 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th, 1837* (New York: William S. Dorris, 1837); *Proceedings of the Anti-slavery Convention of American Women, Held in Philadelphia, May 15th, 16th, 17th, and 18th, 1838, by the American Anti-Slavery Society* (Philadelphia: Merrihew & Gunn, 1838).

⁸⁶ Angelina Grimké, *An Appeal to the Women of the Nominally Free States* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838), 6, 19.

Island, and South Carolina) attended the second national women's antislavery **convention** in the brand-new Liberty Hall in Philadelphia. Just before the meeting, Angelina Grimké and Theodore Weld were married in a simple ceremony attended by blacks and whites. In the evening, in what her most recent biographer called "perhaps her finest moment," Angelina spoke to three thousand people attending the convention. So did Abby Kelley, a young Quaker from Salem, Massachusetts, who made her first public speech that evening. Theodore Weld told her then that she must become an abolitionist speaker or God would strike her dead. Kelly's work in the 1840s plowed the ground for the organized women's rights movement. This whole convention, however, was so controversial that a mob burned down Liberty Hall that night.⁸⁷

In 1839, the convention was again held in Philadelphia. Eighty-four percent of those who attended were from Pennsylvania. Women at the convention voted to hold no more women-only conventions, arguing that if men and women were truly equal, they should meet jointly.⁸⁸

Women who attended the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention in 1848 were active in these national women's antislavery conventions. In 1837, Margaret Prior (probably the same woman who listed herself at the Seneca Falls as "Margaret Pryor") attended the New York City convention. She also attended the 1838 convention, along with seventeen-year-old Elizabeth M'Clintock, her niece, who had moved to Waterloo from Philadelphia, and who became one of the main organizers of the Seneca Falls convention a decade later. Mary Ann M'Clintock, Elizabeth's mother, was listed as a corresponding member of the 1839 woman's antislavery convention, along with Sarah Hunt, niece and ward of Mary Ann M'Clintock and Richard P. Hunt's third wife.⁸⁹

At the same time that women abolitionists organized these meetings, many male abolitionists joined a growing movement toward political abolitionism. They wanted to use their votes as a way to promote antislavery. Political abolitionism was a natural outgrowth of the petition movement. Why continue to send petitions to politicians who refused to accept them? Why not vote to send sympathetic representatives to both state and national offices?

These issues came to a head in 1840, at the May meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Convention in New York City. When pro-woman's rights members voted to seat Abby Kelley on the executive committee, political abolitionists, as well as those who opposed women's public presence, walked out to form the separate American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Association.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton remained on the periphery of this national abolitionist organizing. In 1840, however, her personal and political worlds merged with her marriage to Henry Brewster Stanton, a major political abolitionist. When the World Anti-Slavery Convention met in London in 1840, delegates from both the "old organization" (the

⁸⁷ *Proceedings of the Anti-slavery Convention of American Women, Held in Philadelphia, May 15th, 16th, 17th, and 18th, 1838, by the American Anti-Slavery Society*; Mark Perry, *Lift Up Thy Voice*, 172-76; Dorothy Sterling, *Ahead of Her Time: Abby Kelley and The Politics of Antislavery* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 62-66.

⁸⁸ Of the 102 delegates, 81 were from Pennsylvania, 13 from Massachusetts, 1 from Rhode Island, 4 from New York, 3 from New Jersey. Of the 68 corresponding members, 62 were from Pennsylvania, 2 from New Jersey, and 4 were from New York State (2 from Waterloo, and 1 each from Rochester and Troy).

⁸⁹ *Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, Held in the City of New-York, May 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th, 1837* (New York: William S. Dorr, 1837); *Proceedings of the Anti-slavery Convention of American Women, Held in Philadelphia, May 15th, 16th, 17th, and 18th, 1838, by the American Anti-Slavery Society* (Philadelphia: Merrihew & Gunn, 1838).

American Anti-Slavery Society) and the new American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society attended. Henry B. Stanton brought his bride, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, to the convention on their honeymoon. There, Elizabeth found herself sympathizing far more with American Anti-Slavery Society members than with her husband's political abolitionist friends. In particular, she was enthralled with Quaker Lucretia Mott. The feeling was mutual. Mott reported, "I love her now as one belonging to us." When the convention refused to accept women delegates, including Mott, Stanton recalled that she and Mott resolved that when they returned home they would call a convention to discuss the rights of woman.⁹⁰

Stanton also impressed other abolitionists, both British and American. Richard D. Webb called her "one in ten thousand—I have met with very few women I considered equal to her." William Lloyd Garrison called her "a fearless woman." Notably, he marked her as "one who goes for woman's rights with her whole soul."⁹¹

William Lloyd Garrison, in opposition to Henry B. Stanton and other political abolitionists, arrived at the World Anti-Slavery convention wearing an olive green woolen suit made of cloth manufactured in the Waterloo Woolen mill, free from the labor of slaves, sent to him by Quakers Thomas M'Clintock and Richard P. Hunt, both of whom would be important in the story of the Seneca Falls women's rights convention. In the 1840s, M'Clintock became a major leader in the American Anti-Slavery Society, serving as a member of the Board of Managers from 1843 to 1848 and then becoming a vice president. He also became an agent for the *Liberator* and an antislavery lecturer, organizer, and writer. The whole M'Clintock family was acquainted with Lucretia Mott, who called Thomas M'Clintock "a biblical scholar of some renown."⁹²

Four detailed studies of this convention (by Clare Taylor, Katherine Kish Sklar, Karen Halbersleben, and Clare Midgely) have added considerably to our understanding of the interaction among its key players. Much resistance to Mott emerged because of splits within Quakerism, for example, because Mott and several other women delegates were Hicksite Friends, whereas London Quakers were Orthodox. Ironically, although the convention was called to discuss slavery, it became much better known as a key woman's rights event. Its impact was profound, not only for the young Elizabeth Cady Stanton but also for creating a transatlantic connection between British and American women. For women in the U.S., the support of British women—as personal friends, financial supporters, suppliers of goods for antislavery fairs, evidence of the worldwide importance of abolitionism, and an audience for their work—was incalculable.⁹³

⁹⁰ Mott to Richard and Hannah Webb, 2 April 1841, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

⁹¹ Mott to Richard and Hannah Webb, 2 April 1841, and Richard D. Webb to Elizabeth Pease, 4 November 1840, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Richard and Hannah Webb to Sarah Pugh, quoted in Alma Lutz, *Created Equal*, 34; Mott, Diary, in Frederick B. Tolles, "Slavery and 'The Woman Question'; Lucretia Mott's Diary of Her Visit to Great Britain to Attend the World's Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840," Supplement No. 23 to the *Journal of the Friends Historical Society* (Haverford, Pennsylvania: 1952), 41.

⁹² Wellman, *Road to Seneca Falls*, 109–10.

⁹³ Clare Taylor, comp., *British and American Abolitionists: An Episode in Transatlantic Understanding*. [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1974]; Kathryn Kish Sklar in "'Women Who Speak for an Entire Nation': American and British Women Compared at the World Anti-Slavery Convention, London, 1840," *Pacific Historical Review* 59, no. 4 (1990); Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780–1870* (London: Routledge, 1992); and Karen I. Halbersleben, *Women's Participation in the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1824–1865*, (Lewiston: E. Mellon, 1993).

In the traditional story of Seneca Falls, the leap from the World Anti-Slavery convention in 1840 to the Seneca Falls convention in 1848 was a short one, skipping from Stanton's sojourn with her husband at her parents' home in Johnstown, New York, where he studied law with her father and where their first child, a boy, was born), to Boston (where Henry began his law career and entered politics, Elizabeth set up housekeeping and attended reform lectures, and the Stantons had their next two children, both sons) to Seneca Falls, where the Stantons (really Elizabeth, since Henry stayed behind for most of the year) moved in 1847.

Yet, in terms of abolitionism, legal reform, and events in Stanton's own life, the decade of the 1840s was one of the most dynamic and important in the developing saga of woman's rights. Competition between the American Anti-Slavery Society and political abolitionism dominated the abolitionist movement. Woman's rights activism has rightly been linked to the American Anti-Slavery Society. New research by Michael D. Pierson, Judith Wellman, and others suggests, however, that political abolitionism, too, proved fertile ground for woman's rights. Many abolitionists, including Gerrit Smith, the Weld-Grimké's, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton herself, embraced both women's rights and politics under a broad and flexible umbrella. After the Seneca Falls convention, even nonvoting abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison began to promote votes for women.

In 1840, the newly formed Liberty Party nominated James G. Birney, former slave holder turned abolitionist, for president of the United States. Part of the Liberty Party's debate over antislavery involved a dialogue over the proper role of women. By the late 1840s, Liberty Party women were speaking publicly at party functions and Liberty Party papers were endorsing a wide spectrum of ideas about women. Some papers even supported New York State's married woman's property provision and woman's right to vote. Liberty Party adherents held a wide variety of opinions on women, however, and the Liberty Party itself never took a consistent stand on woman's rights.⁹⁴

In contrast to the Liberty Party, William Lloyd Garrison and the American Anti-Slavery Society condemned political action in favor of moral appeals. Elizabeth Cady Stanton's position was complicated. Although married to Henry Brewster Stanton, one of the most important political abolitionists in the country, Stanton always referred to herself as a Garrisonian, and she subscribed to the *Liberator* in her own name.⁹⁵

By 1842, however, Stanton had come to appreciate the power of the vote. This awareness would serve her well at the Seneca Falls convention. "Are you among those who rejoice at the success of the 'liberty party'?" she asked Elizabeth Neall; "I do very much. . . . Slavery is a political question created & sustained by law, & must be put down by law." To British abolitionist Elizabeth Pease, she explained that American abolitionists had formed two major parties, but "there is in fact a third party, which is a sort of connecting link between the two grand divisions composed of those who have strong sympathies with both. . . I am one of this party." On the one hand, Stanton admired Garrison wholeheartedly. "He is a great reformer, an honest, upright man, ever ready to sacrifice present interest to stern principle, & having no fear of man. I have full confidence in him." Stanton, however, was "not yet fully converted to the doctrine of no human government."

I am in favour, therefore, of political action, the organization of a third party as the most efficient way of calling forth & directing action. So long as we are to be governed by human

⁹⁴ Michael D. Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes: Gender and American Antislavery Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 33; *Chicago Western Citizen*, July 21, 1846; *Cadiz Liberty Advocate*, February 25, 1845, quoted in Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes*, 36–37.

⁹⁵ *Liberator*, subscription list, Boston Public Library.

laws, I shall be unwilling to have the making & administering of those laws left entirely to the selfish & unprincipled part of the community, which would be the case should all our honest men refuse to mingle in political affairs. . . . A party formed and candidates nominated afford a rallying point, a neucleus [*sic*] round which the mass may gather, which gives a reality to antislavery principles which 'no voting' & scatteration cannot boast.⁹⁶

In May 1842, the American Anti-Slavery Society voted to raise \$50,000 to reorganize antislavery societies, and they sent twenty agents across the Northeast to speak about their cause. Eight of these agents—including two of their best, Abby Kelley and Frederick Douglass—traveled through New York State. In the fall, Garrison himself came to upstate New York. One result was the organization of a Western New York Anti-Slavery Society, whose leaders included many people who later attended the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention.

In August 1843, Abby Kelley lectured in Seneca Falls. The ensuing trial of Rhoda Bement, a local Presbyterian abolitionist who had supported Abby Kelley's right to speak, split Seneca Falls churches and raised issues of abolitionism and woman's rights five years before the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention itself.⁹⁷

Quakers dominated the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society, and Quaker women were among its most active leaders. Their first and most regular programs were women's antislavery fairs, organized annually, beginning in February 1843. These fairs connected western New York women directly with women across the northeastern United States and Great Britain. The ability of these women to raise money and maintain this far-flung network made them powerful beyond their small numbers. In 1847, abolitionist women affiliated with the Western New-York Anti-Slavery Society invited Frederick Douglass to set up his *North Star* newspaper in Rochester. Many women active with this society, including Rochester Quaker Amy Post, attended the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention in 1848.

The impact of women within the American Anti-Slavery Society continued to grow. In 1845, black abolitionist J.B. Sanderson wrote to Amy Post about the annual May meeting in New York City that "a few years ago men in this city hissed at the mere idea of Women's speaking in public in promiscuous assemblies; now men come to antislavery conventions, attracted by the announcement that women are to take part in the deliberations and they are often more desirous of hearing women, than men—The world is becoming habituated to it."⁹⁸

In 1847, a group of political abolitionists broke away from the Liberty Party to form a new group called the Liberty League, which encompassed abolitionism among many reforms. Proclaiming "equal rights of all men—equal justice to all men," they met first on June 8–10, 1847, at Macedon Lock, just east of Rochester, and nominated Gerrit Smith for president. Among its other actions, the Liberty League invited women in attendance to vote for the party's nominees for national office—the first known instance in U.S. history that a political party included women as voters at its national convention. In addition, for the first known time in history, women received votes for president of the United States: Lucretia

⁹⁶ Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Elizabeth Neall, 26 November [1841], Sydney Howard Gay Papers, Columbia University; Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Elizabeth Pease, 12 February 1842.

⁹⁷ *Liberator*, February 3, 1843; Glen Altschuler and Ian Saltzgaber, *Revivalism, Social Conscience, and Community in the Burned-over District: The Trial of Rhoda Bement* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983).

⁹⁸ J.B. Sanderson to Amy Post, 8 May 1845; Philip Foner, ed., *Frederick Douglass on Woman's Rights* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1976).

Mott and Lydia Maria Child received one vote each as the Liberty League's candidate for President.⁹⁹

One year later, in June 1848, a month before the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention, this group met again in Buffalo as the National Liberty Convention. There, they included a demand for "universal suffrage in its broadest terms, females as well as males being entitled to vote," marking the first known endorsement by any political party of woman suffrage generally. The convention gave Lucretia Mott five votes for vice president (out of eighty-four). Finally, in a speech printed as *The Liberty Party of the United States, to the People of the United States* (probably written by presidential candidate Gerrit Smith), delegates heard a plea for woman suffrage. "Neither here, nor in any other part of the world," they argued, "is the right of suffrage allowed to extend beyond one of the sexes. This universal exclusion of woman . . . argues, conclusively, that, not as yet, is there one nation so far emerged from barbarism, and so far practically Christian, as to permit woman to rise up to the one level of the human family."¹⁰⁰

The end of the Mexican War in May 1848 reenergized political abolitionists, catalyzing debate about whether territories acquired from Mexico should be slave or free. A new political party—the Free Soil Party—offered abolitionists an alternative to Gerrit Smith's Liberty League. In June 1848, communities across the North and Midwest began to organize the local roots of the Free Soil Party. On June 14 and 15—the same time that the National Liberty Party met in Buffalo—Henry B. Stanton organized the first meeting of the Free Soil Party in Seneca Falls, attracting hundreds of local voters.

Certainly, these conventions powerfully influenced Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Gerrit Smith, the National Liberty Party's nominee for president, was Stanton's cousin. Henry B. Stanton, who called himself a "Free Soil Lion," was her husband. Lucretia Mott was her friend and mentor. The conventions also influenced Frederick Douglass, who (along with black abolitionists Samuel R. Ward and Henry Highland Garnet) was a prominent presence at the National Liberty Convention. The competition between these two parties and between Gerrit Smith and Henry B. Stanton was almost certainly a major topic of conversation in the Stanton household just a month before the Seneca Falls convention. This political competition set the stage for Stanton's demand at Seneca Falls for woman suffrage, Douglass' support of that demand, and Henry's refusal to endorse woman's right to vote (lest he be seen as supporting a plank in the rival National Liberty Party's platform).

There was no predictable progression from revivalism to benevolent reform to abolitionism to woman's rights. In general, woman's rights and abolitionism attracted very different types of women than did benevolent reform. Temperance and moral reform movements bridged the more conservative benevolent reform groups (dedicated to maintaining institutional stability) and abolitionism (with its emphasis on individual rights).

Beginning in the late eighteenth century, Americans discussed woman's rights through debates about republican motherhood, women's education, temperance, and moral reform. In each of these movements, they justified an investment in women as individuals because women needed help in their roles as wives and mothers.

Legal reform and abolitionism changed the nature of this debate. For the first time, women argued for a public voice, not as wives and mothers but as citizens. As abolitionists,

⁹⁹ *National Era*, June 24, 1847. <http://library.syr.edu/digital/collections/g/GerritSmith/447.htm>; *Address of the Macedon Convention*, by William Goodell; and *Letters of Gerrit Smith* (Albany, New York: S.W. Green, 1847); Gerrit Smith, "To the Editors of the *Emancipator*," Boston, August 23, 1847.

¹⁰⁰ Report on the Liberty League convention from the *Liberator*, June 23, 1848, copied from the *New York Commercial Advertiser; Proceedings of the National Liberty Convention, Held at Buffalo, N.Y., June 14th and 15th, 1848* (Utica, New York: S.W. Green, 1848), 5, 14. See <http://library.syr.edu/digital/collections/g/GerritSmith/453.htm>.

that voice was raised on behalf of people in slavery, not for women as women. But it was women's voices that must be heard. Beginning in the late 1820s, Frances Wright and Maria W. Stewart alerted Americans to the possibility that women might debate political issues in public spaces. In the 1830s, Sarah and Angelina Grimké, Abby Kelley, and Lucretia Mott pushed the boundaries of women's public activism. By 1847, when Lucy Stone began lecturing specifically for woman's rights, women were still oddities on the public platform, but their voices were increasingly beginning to be heard.

This brief review of the context of the early woman's rights movement suggests certain conclusions. Although women's rights advocates found allies and learned organizational techniques in the abolitionist movement, they brought their women's rights ideas into abolitionism. Neither were woman's rights advocates affiliated solely with the American Anti-Slavery Society. Some of those associated with the Liberty Party, Liberty League, and Free Soil Party also became woman's rights advocates.

Against the background of this new scholarship on the woman's rights movement in general, we can begin to look more specifically at the Seneca Falls convention in 1848.

Why did it happen in Seneca Falls in 1848? What was its national significance?

THE SENECA FALLS WOMAN'S RIGHTS CONVENTION:

WHAT HAPPENED?

The Convention, Seneca Falls, 1848

On July 19-20, 1848, about 300 women and men met in the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls to hold the world's first woman's rights convention. It was no accident that the convention happened here. Far from being an out-of-the-way rural village, Seneca Falls was a small city of about 4000 people. Like the neighboring village of Waterloo, whose citizens also attended the woman's rights convention, Seneca Falls was at the cutting edge of national economic, social, and cultural changes. Located on a turnpike, canal, and railroad, both communities straddled major transportation routes between East coast cities and newly opened lands in the West. Named after the forty-three-foot falls at its center, Seneca Falls had the highest drop of usable waterpower east of the Mississippi River. These falls provided waterpower for nine flour mills as well as pump factories and textile mills.¹⁰¹

Recovering from the effects of the Depression of 1837, Seneca Falls and Waterloo attracted people who were connected directly to major national reform leaders, organizations, and events in Boston, eastern New York, and Philadelphia. Of these cities, Boston was closely associated with radical abolitionism, Transcendentalism, and Unitarianism. Philadelphia was the center of Quaker reform. New York City became the favorite convention city by the 1840s, where the American Anti-Slavery Society, the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, and temperance and moral reform societies held annual conventions every May. Albany was the focus of legal reform in New York State. These cities were also centers of African American activism, with African American schools, churches, vigilance committees (organized to help people escape from slavery), and newspapers.

Among reformers who came to Seneca Falls and Waterloo were those who organized the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention. Organizers were cosmopolitan, representing national influences and thinking in terms of universal human good. They read William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*, whose motto was "Our country is the world—Our countrymen are mankind." After 1847, they also read Frederick Douglass' *North Star*, whose motto was "Right is of no sex. Truth is of no color." The M'Clintocks and Hunts, along with Martha Wright, Lucretia Mott, Amy Post, and several other Seneca Falls woman's rights advocates also worked on the Underground Railroad.

Organizers of the convention had contact with national abolitionist leaders, both in the American Anti-Slavery Society and among political abolitionists. Some had also worked with legal reformers. By connecting these three groups—abolitionists associated with the American Anti-Slavery Society, political abolitionists, and legal reformers, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and other early woman's rights leaders moved woman's rights ideas beyond radical abolitionism, on the one hand, and legal reform, on the other, to create a major national movement that involved Americans across the country debating the very definition of citizenship.

Lengthy debate in New York State about the right of married women to own property provided the background. For twelve years, New Yorkers debated the married women's property act, and its passage in April 1848 created hope for further progress. As Stanton noted, the Married Women's Property Act "encouraged action on the part of women,"

¹⁰¹ The Census for the State of New York reported 3997 people in the Town of Seneca Falls in 1845. Much of the narrative and argument in this section is based on Wellman, Road to Seneca Falls.

because “if the men who make the laws were ready for some onward step, surely the women themselves should express interest in legislation.”¹⁰²

In June 1848, in the context of discussion about married women's property rights, two key events set the stage for the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention. Both events emerged from abolitionism. The first was the formation of a new political party, the Free Soil Party, splitting old political allegiances in Seneca Falls and across the northern United States. The second was a deep division within Genesee Yearly Meeting of Friends, meeting in Farmington, New York, resulting in a new group of reform Quakers, the Congregational Friends. These events acted like a magnifying glass, focusing national influences on this one small area of central New York. On July 19–20, 1848, a small group of local activists translated egalitarian ideas into specific action, a woman's rights convention, and they articulated those ideas in a specific document—the Declaration of Sentiments. The country would never be the same.

In Seneca Falls itself, the Free Soil Party broke apart traditional Whig-Democratic political alliances. On June 13, 1848, 196 men (about one-quarter of all eligible voters in the village), including Elizabeth Cady Stanton's husband Henry B. Stanton, signed an invitation to “the freemen of Seneca Falls” to consider how voters could find candidates to restrict slavery. Slavery was “the chiefest curse and foulest disgrace that attaches to our institutions,” noted a local lawyer, Ansel Bascom. By organizing the Free Soil Party, these voters acted as citizens not of Seneca Falls or New York State but of the United States. But what did their commitment mean? Nationally, many Free Soilers hoped to make the new territories free for whites only. Locally, however, many Free Soil advocates were abolitionists, and Free Soil excitement arose around ideals of equality.¹⁰³

The woman's rights convention was the first public reform meeting to be held after Free Soilers left their traditional political parties. Free Soil advocates came to the convention, perhaps personally convinced by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, perhaps interested in what the Married Woman's Property Act meant for their wives and daughters, perhaps hoping to recruit new members for their own party. Whatever their reasons, more than one-third of the signers of the Declaration of Sentiments belonged to families affiliated with the new Free Soil Party.

As the local Free Soil candidate for Congress, Bascom attended the woman's rights convention. So did Jacob Chamberlain, Stanton's neighbor, who was president of the Free Soil meeting; Charles Hoskins, local merchant and secretary of the meeting; William Conklin, gardener; A.C. Gibbs, grocery man; Oliver S. Latham, master carpenter; Joshua Martin, boat builder; Nathan J. Milliken, editor of the *Seneca County Courier*; Whiting Race, lumberman and president of the Village of Seneca Falls in 1848; Henry Seymour, pump maker; Robert Smalldridge, cooper; S.D. Tillman, lawyer; Isaac VanTassel, cooper; S.E. Woodworth, dry goods merchant; and Henry B. Stanton himself. In addition to these men, many members of their families also attended the woman's rights convention.

On July 11, 1848, three days before the first Free Soil meeting in Seneca Falls, another seismic shift occurred in western New York. Quakers at Genesee Yearly Meeting in Farmington, New York, split over issues related to abolitionism. All Quakers were antislavery, but many objected to Friends working with the “world's people” in abolitionist

¹⁰² Theodore Stanton and Harriot Stanton Blatch, eds., *Elizabeth Cady Stanton as Revealed in Her Letters, Diary, and Reminiscences*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1922) 1:149.

¹⁰³ *Seneca County Courier*, June 13, 1848, and August 16, 1848. In the summer of 1848, the *Seneca County Courier* published three more lists of Free Soil supporters. On August 3, 1848, sixty-three of them went to the national convention in Buffalo as delegates, where they helped nominate Martin Van Buren for president of the United States.

organizations. In particular, they opposed opening their meetinghouses to paid non-Quaker abolitionist lecturers. These debates affected Quaker process. Did individual Quakers have a right to decide to make these decisions? Or should separate meetings of ministers and elders assume that authority?

For five years, Friends from western New York, Canada, and Michigan, meeting annually at Farmington, had debated a resolution introduced by Michigan Quarterly Meeting to abolish all meetings of ministers and elders. Did anyone, in fact, have the authority to make decisions for anyone else? Sympathizers of Michigan Friends thought not. After Lucretia Mott delivered "one of the best sermons I ever listened to," wrote one observer, about two hundred of them walked out. For the next three days, men and women met together, not separately, as in traditional Quaker meetings, for "deeply interesting and feeling" conferences.¹⁰⁴

Clerks for this meeting were Thomas M'Clintock of Waterloo and Rhoda DeGarmo of Rochester. Although Lucretia Mott remained a Quaker all her life, her sympathies were all with the reformers. "The high handed measure of those in power," she wrote later, "must eventually open the eyes of the people to the impropriety and danger of conferring such power on our fellow mortals." She reported to English Friend Richard D. Webb, "Three yearly m[ee]tin[gs]. will be formed this autumn on radical principles —doing away with select mgs. & ordain[ing] ministers, men and women on perfect equality. What a wonderful breaking up there is among sects." These Quakers were breaking down boundaries, between men and women, blacks and whites, Quakers and the world. As Mott told her followers, "Thy sect is the righteous of Earth."¹⁰⁵

Susan B. A was then teaching in Canajoharie, New York. Daniel Anthony was one of those who walked out of Genesee Yearly Meeting. In a letter to his daughter, Susan (later to become one of the country's most famous woman's rights advocates), he emphasized that the division was not simply procedural but substantive:

Farmington Yearly meeting at thier [sic] last getting together divided—That portion of its members who take the liberty of holding up to view the wickedness of War—Slavery Intemperance—Hanging &c . . . That portion of the society who are not exactly satisfied to confine their operations for ameliorating the conditions of man within the compass of an old shriveled up nutshell [. . .] and who are of opinion that each individual should have a right to even think as well as act for himself & in his own way to assist in rooling [sic] on the wheel of reform has left the more orthodox—wise and self righteous part of the society to attend to nothing but matters of pure & undefiled religion.¹⁰⁶

In October, this group of Quakers came back to Farmington to form a new organization called the Congregational Friends. As their founding document, they adopted *The Basis of Religious Association*, written by Thomas M'Clintock. They called themselves congregational because each local congregation had authority to make its own decisions. They recognized no separate groups of ministers and elders. They welcomed everyone, and

¹⁰⁴ Benjamin Gue, *The Diary of Benjamin Gue in Rural New York and Pioneer Iowa, 1847–1856*, ed. Earle D. Ross (Ames: Iowa State University Press, ca. 1962).

¹⁰⁵ [Thomas M'Clintock], *An Address to Friends of Genesee Yearly Meeting, and Elsewhere* (Seneca Falls, New York: Milliken and Mumford, 1848), 8; Mott to George W. Julian, November 14, 1848, Mott Papers; Mott to Richard D. Webb, [etc.], September 10, 1848, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; John Ketcham to Amy and Isaac Post, March 11, 1841, Post Family Papers, University of Rochester.

¹⁰⁶ Daniel Anthony to Susan B. Anthony, July 16, 1848, Susan B. Anthony Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.

men and women met together, not separately. They had no creed. "The true basis of religious fellowship," they agreed, "is not identity of theological belief, but unity of heart and oneness of purpose in respect to the great practical duties of life." Quakers from Junius Monthly Meeting in Waterloo, including the M'Clintock family, led the walkout at Genesee Yearly Meeting at Farmington.¹⁰⁷

The woman's rights convention was the first reform meeting to be held since these Quakers broke away from the religious institution that had shaped their whole lives. Elizabeth Cady Stanton brought these Quakers together with families in Seneca Falls affiliated with the Free Soil Party. Free Soil advocates formed the single largest group of signers of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments. Those associated with reform-minded Quakers formed the second largest group. About one-quarter of the signers of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments belonged to Quakers affiliated with Farmington Quarterly Meeting (either Orthodox or Hicksite) and Genesee Yearly Meeting of Friends. In 1848, many of them formed the new Congregational Friends.¹⁰⁸

Against the background of the Married Woman's Property Act, these cataclysmic breaks—in political institutions centered in Seneca Falls and religious institutions centered in Waterloo and western New York—set the stage for the woman's rights convention. Crisscrossing that stage came one woman, physically diminutive but spiritually heroic. Lucretia Mott traveled to upstate New York to visit her sister Martha Wright in Auburn, but Auburn was not her only destination. She and her husband James were at Genesee Yearly Meeting at Farmington on those momentous days in June. They also visited prisoners at Auburn prison and made "trips of a few hundred or a thousand miles or so, to the Indians & Negroes in Canada." The character of Mott's message was consistent, reported the *New York Tribune*. She "fearlessly opposes Slavery of all kinds, and advocates thorough Education for all, Peace and Land Reform. She . . . insisted that Practical Christianity was the only thing important—creeds and forms being of little account."¹⁰⁹

As part of their trip, the Motts visited Seneca Indians at Cattaraugus, in western New York. Senecas officially formed the Seneca Nation in 1848, adopting a constitution and government based on male voting. This new form of government challenged women's traditional political power, in which clan mothers chose chiefs. Lucretia Mott may not have understood the complexity of the issues, for she commented only that the Senecas were "imitating the movements of France and all Europe, in seeking larger liberty—more independence." She did, however, respect their religious expression, making no judgments about whether traditional Seneca dances, Christian services, or indeed her own "Quaker

¹⁰⁷ [Thomas M'Clintock], *Basis of Religious Association. Adopted by the Conference Held at Farmington, in the State of New York, on the Sixth and Seventh of Tenth Month, 1848 in Proceedings of the Yearly Meeting of Congregational Friends* (Auburn, New York: Henry Oliphant, 1850), 44–48; *New York Tribune*, June 16, 1855; Christopher Densmore and Judith Wellman, "Thomas and Mary Ann M'Clintock," in *American National Biography*, eds. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). Lucretia Mott to George W. Julian, November 14, 1848, noted, "We have only received the 'Preceedings' of Farmington, N. York, which I will send as a sample of a broad 'Basis.' Thos. McClintock, before spoken of [,] is the writer of that document. About 200 persons adopted it." For a discussion of the turmoil in New York State Quakerism in this period, see Hugh Barbour and Christopher Densmore, *Quaker Crosscurrents* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 100–45.

¹⁰⁸ Wellman, *Road to Seneca Falls*, 207–8.

¹⁰⁹ *New York Tribune* article reprinted in *Pennsylvania Freeman*, June 29, 1848. Thanks to Christopher Densmore for locating this source. Mott to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, July 16, 1848; Mott to Richard D. Webb, September 10, 1848, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

non-conformity” brought people closer to God. “We commended them to the ‘Great Spirit,’ believing that those who danced religiously, might be as nearly perfect, as were those who communed in some other chosen form—neither of these being the test of acceptance,” Mott commented. The Motts witnessed the strawberry dance, and Lucretia Mott reported her impressions:

Grotesque though the figures were, fantastic their appearance, and rude their measured steps, and unharmonious their music, yet, in observing the profound veneration of the hundreds present, some twenty of whom were performers, and the respectful attention paid to the speeches of their chiefs, women as well as men, it was far from me to say, that our silent, voiceless worship was better adapted to their condition, or that even the Missionary, Baptism, and Sabbath, and organ are so much higher evidence of a civilized, spiritual and Christian state.¹¹⁰

While the Motts were visiting prisoners, African Americans in Canada, and the Seneca people, most Americans focused their attention on celebrating the Fourth of July. In Seneca Falls, men, women, and children marched up one side of the river and down the other to their traditional gathering place in Ansel Bascom’s orchard, where Dexter Bloomer recited the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that to secure those rights, governments are instituted among men.”¹¹¹

Ideals of liberty and revolution took on an extra dimension on this Fourth of July. For a “glorious Revolution” had come that spring to France. On March 4, the new French republic abolished slavery, and on March 5, it established universal male suffrage. Americans, especially abolitionists, sympathized with the new democracy. On March 16, 1848, the provisional government of France declared, “[E]very citizen is an elector. Every elector is sovereign. The law is equal and absolute for all.” They meant, however, “all male citizens,” and a group of French women protested that very day that if the “revolution has been made for all” and women were assuredly “half of everyone,” then “there could not be two liberties, two equalities, two fraternities,” that “the people” is “composed of two sexes.” Two days later, Emma Willard, principal of the school that Stanton herself had attended, sent an open letter to Dupont de L’Eure, advocating a public place for women in the new government. Stanton certainly knew of the French revolution, through regularly reading Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune*, James Gordon Bennett’s *New York Herald*, Douglass’ *North Star*, and Garrison’s *Liberator*, all of which reported news of it. She herself alluded to it in a speech later that fall. It is not clear, however, whether she knew of French women’s demands for suffrage.¹¹²

Meanwhile, in Rochester, Frederick Douglass gave his own speech on the Fourth of July. Douglass asserted that the French revolution reverberated around the globe. “Thanks to steam navigation and electric wires. . . .” Douglass argued, “the revolution of France, like a

¹¹⁰ Mott to E.Q. [Edmund Quincy], 24 August 1848, printed in the *Liberator*, October 6, 1848.

¹¹¹ *Seneca County Courier*, July 7, 1848.

¹¹² Saint-Gieles, March 16, 1848, quoted in Karen Offen, “Women and the Question of ‘Universal’ Suffrage in 1848: A Transatlantic Comparison of Suffrage Rhetoric,” *NWSA Journal* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1999).

bolt of living thunder, has aroused the world from its stupor." Yet the Fourth of July was "the anniversary of American hypocrisy," since it celebrated only "white liberty."¹¹³

In this context, on July 9, five days after the Fourth of July, Lucretia Mott and her sister, Martha Wright, came to visit Jane Hunt in Waterloo. There, they met with "several members of different families of Friends, earnest, thoughtful women." Most likely, these Friends included Mary Ann M'Clintock and perhaps Mary Ann's two oldest daughters, Elizabeth and Mary Ann. Jane Hunt also invited one other woman, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the only non-Quaker among the group. According to Hunt family tradition, Richard P. Hunt joined this discussion.¹¹⁴

With Stanton's presence, what probably began as a chance to discuss common concerns turned into something quite different. Inspired by sympathetic audience, Stanton "poured out," she remembered, "the torrent of my long-accumulating discontent, with such vehemence and indignation that I stirred myself, as well as the rest of the party, to do and dare anything." As Stanton later described her experience,

The general discontent that I felt with woman's portion as wife, mother, housekeeper, physician, and spiritual guide, the chaotic conditions into which everything fell without her constant supervision, and the wearied, anxious look of the majority of women impressed me with a strong feeling that some active measures should be taken to remedy the wrongs of society in general, and of women in particular. My experience at the World's Antislavery Convention, all I had read of the legal status of women, and the oppression I saw everywhere, together swept across my soul, intensified now by many personal experiences. It seemed as if all the elements had conspired to impel me to some onward step.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ *North Star*, July 7, 1848.

¹¹⁴ Stanton gives several different lists of those who attended this gathering. In many of them, she collapsed this meeting at the Hunt house, where she and others wrote the call to the convention, with the gathering at the M'Clintock house a few days later, where Stanton and the M'Clintocks worked on the Declaration of Sentiments and resolutions. In Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:67, Stanton listed four women—Lucretia Mott, Martha C. Wright, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Mary Ann M'Clintock—who met at the Hunt house as authors of the call. In her obituary for Elizabeth M'Clintock Phillips in *Woman's Journal* (November 21, 1896): 373, Stanton added several names to the organizing process. She noted that "the discussions as to the wisdom of calling a convention took place at their home. The historic table round which the moving spirits, Lucretia Mott, Martha Wright, Mary Ann M'Clintock, Jane Hunt, James Mott, Thomas M'Clintock, Richard Hunt, the two daughters and myself drew up the declaration and resolutions, is still in possession of the family." Yet we know that neither Martha Wright nor Lucretia and James Mott came to the M'Clintock house that day, for Mott wrote to Stanton from Auburn, dating the letter Sunday, July 16, saying that James was sick. David Wright ("Account Book, July 16, [1848], Osborne Papers, Syracuse University) confirmed that Lucretia Mott was in Auburn, noting that she held a meeting in the Universalist Church in the afternoon. (Wright, By 1898, in *Eighty Years*, 147–49, Stanton included five women, the four she had mentioned in Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage* plus Jane Hunt. "The call," she wrote, "was inserted without signatures . . . but the chief movers and managers were Lucretia Mott, Mary Ann M'Clintock, Jane Hunt, Martha C. Wright, and myself." In "Mrs. Stanton's Letter to the Suffrage Convention. Held in Washington, D.C., in 1898," (Scrapbook 3, Stanton Papers, Vassar College), she noted that "the seven women who inaugurated this movement, were Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Martha C. Wright, Jane Hunt, Mary Ann M'Clintock and her two daughters," presumably Elizabeth and Mary Ann Jr. (A typescript that seems to be a version of this letter is now at the University of Rochester.) In an undated "Reminiscences" at the Minnesota Historical Society, Stanton noted, "[T]his committee consisted of five quakeresses and myself." Richard P. Hunt, grandson of Richard P. Hunt, interview with John Becker, March 19, 1948, quoted in Becker, *History of Waterloo*, 155.

¹¹⁵ *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:67.

Stanton's enthusiasm transformed this meeting into a planning session for what she called "the greatest revolution the world has ever seen." The group made a decision that no one of them could have made alone. They decided to call "a public meeting for protest and discussion." They based this idea not on their experience as citizens of Seneca Falls and Waterloo nor on their experience as Quakers.

Although they met in Waterloo, these women were well connected to national reform organizations, and they viewed their efforts in a national and international context. They patterned their plans for a woman's rights convention directly on antislavery conventions, with speakers, resolutions, and a declaration. All the organizers of the Seneca Falls convention had participated regularly in abolitionist meetings, beginning with the attendance of Lucretia Mott and Martha Wright at the organizational meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833, continuing through the experience of several Quakers with the national woman's antislavery meetings in the late 1830s, the attendance of Mott and Stanton at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840, and the participation of Mott, the M'Clintocks, and sometimes Stanton in antislavery meetings both regionally (through the Western New-York Anti-Slavery Society) and nationally (at annual meetings of the American Anti-Slavery Society) throughout the early 1840s.

The Wesleyan Chapel was the only place in Seneca Falls that held reform meetings, so that was where they met. Wesleyan Methodists had formed in 1843, explicitly on antislavery principles. They hosted abolitionist and temperance speakers, and members—both African American and European American—supported the Underground Railroad. Luther Lee, one of the most influential early Wesleyan ministers, argued that "the Gospel is so radically reformatory, that to preach it fully and clearly, is to attack and condemn all wrong, and to assert and defend all righteousness." In 1843, Abby Kelley called the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls "a free discussion house."¹¹⁶

Organizers of the woman's rights convention had to schedule the proposed meeting as soon as possible. Mott's presence was essential because she was the only experienced public speaker among them, and she would be leaving central New York within a few days. So, as Stanton remembered, "Before the twilight deepened into night," they wrote a brief notice:

WOMAN'S RIGHTS CONVENTION—A Convention to discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of woman, will be held in the Wesleyan Chapel, at Seneca Falls, N.Y., on Wednesday and Thursday, the 19th and 20th of July, current; commencing at 10 o'clock A.M. During the first day the meeting will be exclusively for women, who are earnestly invited to attend. The public generally are invited to be present on the second day, when Lucretia Mott, of Philadelphia, and other ladies and gentlemen, will address the convention.¹¹⁷

The women were all aware, as Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote on July 14 to Elizabeth M'Clintock, that this was "the first woman's rights convention that has ever assembled." They conceived this to be a nationally significant meeting, and they used their national connections to publicize the event. Time, however, was against them. Only eight days elapsed

¹¹⁶ Luther Lee, *Five Sermons*, 11, quoted in Douglas M. Strong, *Perfectionist Politics: Abolitionism and the Religious Tensions of American Democracy* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 100; Abby Kelley to Stephen Foster, August 13, 1843, Abby Kelley Foster Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

¹¹⁷ *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:68; *Seneca County Courier*, July 11, 1848.

between the time the first notice of the convention appeared in the *Seneca County Courier* and the start of the convention on July 19.¹¹⁸

On Friday, July 14, Stanton wrote to Lydia Maria Child, Maria Chapman, and Sarah Grimké, asking “for some good letters to read in the Convention,” but she received nothing from them. Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth M’Clintock both wrote to Frederick Douglass, who accepted with pleasure. He responded to Elizabeth M’Clintock on Friday, June 14:

To be sure I will do myself the pleasure of accepting your kind invitation to attend the proposed woman’s convention at Seneca Falls. I think that one or two more of the Post family will be present also. Your notice did not reach me in time for this paper—but happily I received one from our mutual Friend Lucretia Mott.¹¹⁹

Lucretia Mott and Frederick Douglass were therefore the only nationally known speakers represented at the convention.

Lucretia Mott supported the convention organizers’ work from Auburn. “I was right glad to hear of thy resolve,” she wrote from Martha Wright’s house the Sunday before the meeting, “& hope thou wilt not give out.” James Mott wanted Stanton to “reserve it [her main presentation] for the second day, so that he & others may be able to hear it.” Mott expected to be at the Wednesday planning session, and Martha Wright would come with her, but James Mott was not well and would not be there until Thursday morning.¹²⁰

The Seneca Falls convention was important as the country’s first convention for woman’s rights. But it gained significance far beyond its own time because its main document, the Declaration of Sentiments, tied the rights of women to the Declaration of Independence. It brought several strands of woman’s rights arguments together into one simple, compelling argument: women were citizens, and they therefore had the rights of citizens.

But who wrote the Declaration of Sentiments? Stanton began to draft ideas for a document, and by July 14, she was already calling it a “declaration.” She did, however, expect that it would be a group effort. On Friday, July 14, she notified Elizabeth M’Clintock that “rain or shine,” she would spend Sunday with them, arriving on the ten o’clock train, “that we may all together concoct a declaration. I have drawn up one but you may suggest any alterations & improvements for I know it is not as perfect a declaration as should go forth from the first woman’s rights convention that has ever assembled.”¹²¹

Of all the M’Clintock family, Stanton wrote to twenty-seven-year-old Elizabeth M’Clintock for a reason. As historian Andrea Constantine Hawkes noted, Elizabeth M’Clintock’s energy and vision made her a key player in organizing the convention. Besides being “attractive in manners and appearance,” Stanton noted, she “had rare executive ability, was capable of intense enthusiasm and earnest in her convictions of truth.”¹²²

¹¹⁸ Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Elizabeth M’Clintock, Grassmere, Friday morning [July 14, 1848], reprinted in *Heirlooms of History* 7 (November 1992), location of original unknown.

¹¹⁹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Elizabeth M’Clintock, Grassmere, Friday morning [July 14, 1848]; Frederick Douglass to Elizabeth M’Clintock, Rochester, July 14, [1848], Women’s Rights National Historical Park; “Subscribers” (manuscript list of subscribers to newspapers and periodicals in Seneca Falls, ca. 1850), Seneca Falls Historical Society.

¹²⁰ Mary Bascom Bull, “Woman’s Rights and Other Reforms,” *Seneca Falls Reveille*, July 9, 1880; Mott to Stanton, July 16, 1848, Stanton Papers, Library of Congress.

¹²¹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Elizabeth M’Clintock, Grassmere, Friday morning [July 14, 1848].

On Sunday, July 16, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Elizabeth M'Clintock were probably joined by several other members of the M'Clintock family—including Elizabeth's sister, Mary Ann (age twenty-six), their mother Mary Ann, and perhaps two younger sisters Sarah (age twenty-five) and Julia (age seventeen), and father Thomas M'Clintock. Younger brother Charles may well have been in the house, too. For ideas, they “resigned themselves to a faithful perusal of various masculine productions,” including the reports of “Peace, Temperance, and Antislavery conventions.” But “all alike,” Stanton recalled, “seemed too tame and pacific for the inauguration of a rebellion such as the world had never before seen.” “After much delay, one of the circle took up the Declaration of 1776, and read it aloud with much spirit and emphasis, and it was at once decided to adopt the historic document, with some slight changes such as substituting ‘all men; for ‘King George.’ Everyone, recalled Stanton, pronounced it to be “just the thing.”¹²³

Stanton noted that “one of the circle” suggested the Declaration of Independence as a model. Probably, then, one of the M'Clintock family actually came up with this idea. Using the Declaration of Independence as a model was not an unusual concept. Many reformers, from temperance advocates to abolitionists, drew on the Declaration of Independence. The authors may have used “Declaration of Sentiments” as a title to refer to the 1833 founding document of the American Anti-Slavery Society.¹²⁴

With help from several local lawyers, the women tried hard to find eighteen grievances to match those of the colonists against King George. As Ann Gordon noted, Elisha Hurlbut, *Essays on Human Rights, and Their Political Guaranties* was a particularly important source, and the authors of the declaration “followed Hurlbut in all their examples.” “After hours of diligent searching, of creeds, codes, customs and constitutions,” Stanton recalled, “we were rejoiced to find that we could make out as good a bill of impeachment against our sires and sons as they had against old King George.” Young Charles M'Clintock overheard the women laughing in the parlor and remarked, “maliciously,” Stanton later teased, ““Your grievances must be very grievous indeed, if it takes you so long to find them.””¹²⁵

¹²² Andrea Constantine Hawkes, “The Life of Elizabeth McClintock Phillips, 1821–1896: A Story of Family, Friends, Community, and a Self-Made Woman” (Ph.D. diss., University of Maine, 2006); Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Elizabeth M'Clintock, Grassmere, Friday morning [14 July 1848]. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “In Memoriam” [obituary for Elizabeth M'Clintock Phillips], *Woman's Journal* 27, no. 47 (November 21, 1896): 373.

¹²³ Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage* 1:68; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Revolution* (September 17, 1868): 161–62; Harriot Stanton Blatch to Alma Lutz, August 11, 1933, Lutz Papers, Vassar.

¹²⁴ “Abstract of the Annual Report of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society,” *The National Era* (May 25, 1848): 73, began with “Our fathers solemnly declared that all men are created equal, and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; and that, to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among men. At the present moment, while the people of Europe are contending for these great blessings, this country is agitated with the discussion whether the sublime doctrines of the authors of the American Declaration of Independence—“Liberty, Equality, Fraternity”—shall have practical efficacy among their descendants.” See Philip S. Foner, ed., *We, the Other People: Alternative Declarations of Independence by Labor Groups, Farmers, Woman's Rights Advocates, Socialists, and Blacks, 1829–1975* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976).

¹²⁵ Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:67–69; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Revolution* (September 17, 1868): 161–62; Ann D. Gordon, ed., *Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton & Susan B. Anthony, Vol I.: In the School of Anti-Slavery, 1840–1866* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 86; Elisha Hurlbut, *Essays on Human Rights, and Their Political*

Remarkably, the declaration made no explicit mention of slavery. For a group so imbued with (and indebted to) abolitionist ideals, this may seem strange. Yet those present were also committed to creating a new movement, separate from the abolitionism that gave them birth. So they deliberately avoided specific mention of slavery and women in slavery. Neither did the declaration emphasize class differences, although it did mention lack of employment opportunities for women. Instead, these women preferred to emphasize a universal sense of womanhood.

Future conventions made the tension between race, class, and sex more explicit. Congregational Friends were particularly sensitive to issues of race and class. Two weeks after Seneca Falls, for example, women at the Rochester convention, led by Sarah Owens, highlighted the plight of working women. Women at Salem, Ohio, consistently linked issues of slavery with issues of woman's rights. At Worcester, however, as John McClymer has suggested, conservative woman's rights advocates attempted to distance themselves from radical abolitionists by refusing to print speeches by people such as Lucretia Mott. Similarly, the Akron, Ohio, convention, best known to us today for a speech by Sojourner Truth, did not include her speech in the minutes. The minutes noted only that "remarks upon the subject of Education were made by Mrs. Coe, Sojourner Truth, Rev. George Schlosser and Miss Sarah Coates."¹²⁶

One phrase in the introduction to the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments led to considerable debate at several future conventions. "The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her," read the last phrase of the preamble. This language was taken directly from the Declaration of Independence, substituting "man" for King George and "woman" for the colonists. Implying as it did direct personal responsibility on the part of individual men for wrongs committed daily against women, many men (and women) took offense. The first national convention at Worcester in 1850 and the Cleveland convention in 1853 debated this issue thoroughly. Abolitionists such as Garrison and Mott argued for the truth of individual responsibility, while Paulina Wright Davis and Wendell Phillips made the case that both men and women were trapped in a system of laws and social relations that should be collectively changed.

Only two questions generated any serious division at the convention. The first was the role of men. The second was whether the convention should support woman suffrage.

As the first woman's rights convention, the role of men was not immediately clear. Two models suggested themselves. The first was that of Henry Brewster Stanton. Although he did vote to seat women delegates at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, Henry Stanton never recorded his own thoughts about the Seneca Falls convention. We have the best record of his response to Seneca Falls in a sketch of Elizabeth Cady Stanton written by Theodore Tilton in 1868. When Elizabeth told Henry that she intended to propose a resolution for woman suffrage, Henry was, reported Tilton, "thunderstruck" and "amazed at her daring." "You will turn the proceedings," he declared, "into a farce." Henry boycotted the convention, conveniently leaving town to give Free Soil lectures.¹²⁷

Guaranties (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1848); Bullard, "Elizabeth Cady Stanton," *Our Famous Women*, 613–14; Martha Wright to Lucretia Mott, January 6, 1856, Garrison Papers, Smith College.

¹²⁶ John McClymer, "How Do Contemporary Newspaper Accounts of the 1850 Worcester Woman's Rights Convention Enhance Our Understanding of the Issues Debated at That Meeting?" *Women and Social Movements*, Katharine Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin (Alexandria, Virginia: Alexander Street Press, 2006); *The Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Akron, Ohio, May 28 and 29, 1851* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Ben Franklin, 1851), 7.

Other men felt differently, however. The call to the convention clearly stated that “during the first day the meeting will be exclusively for women,” while “the public generally are invited to be present on the second day.” According to the minutes, men did not participate on the first day of the meeting, but some men seem to have attended. Charlotte Woodward remembered that she found the “courage to stay over for the second day’s sessions” because of the presence of so many “uncommonly liberal men” on the first day.¹²⁸

Of the one hundred people who supported the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments, thirty-two were men. James Mott chaired the convention on Thursday during the day. Thomas M’Clintock chaired it in the evening. Many men—including Frederick Douglass, Samuel Tillman, George Pryor, and Ansel Bascom (who attended the convention but did not sign the declaration)—spoke at the convention.

The thirty-two male signers actually signed a separate list “in favor of the movement.” Such a separate list seems to have reflected a compromise between those (such as Stanton), who believed that women should take a leadership role in the new movement, and others (such as Mott), who argued that men should play a role, as well. In a speech she gave beginning in September, Stanton argued that “woman herself must do this work; for woman alone can understand the height, and the breadth of her own degradation. Man cannot speak for her, because he has been educated to believe that she differs from him so materially, that he cannot judge of her thoughts, feelings, and opinions by his own.” Mott, on the other hand, promoted the “zealous and untiring efforts of both men and women.”¹²⁹

On that first morning, the women debated “in an animated manner . . . the propriety of obtaining the signatures of men to the Declaration.” They voted that men should be asked to sign, but they would defer a final decision until the next day, when men themselves would be present to speak. Men who refrained from signing “in favor of the movement” may have been respecting Stanton’s desire that women should take the lead. The first evening of the convention, Lucretia Mott, perhaps to smooth over any ruffled feelings, explicitly asked men to express their opinions.¹³⁰

Just as debates about male participation in the convention caused concern on the first day, woman suffrage seems to have been the most controversial issue on the second day. Official minutes noted that certain resolutions “from their self-evident truth, elicited but little remark; others, after some criticism, much debate, and some slight alterations, were finally passed by a large majority.” Eliab W. Capron, editor of the *National Reformer* and

¹²⁷ Tilton, “Elizabeth Cady Stanton,” in Bullard, ed., *Our Famous Women*, 613–14; the *New York Tribune*, July 19, 1848, reported that Henry Stanton lectured in Canandaigua.

¹²⁸ Rheta Childe Dorr, *Susan B. Anthony: The Woman Who Changed the Mind of a Nation* (New York: AMS Press, 1928), 4; Bull, “Woman’s Rights and Other ‘Reforms,’” *Seneca Falls Reveille*, July 9, 1880; Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:69, noted that James Mott took the chair on the first day. The *Report of the Woman’s Rights Convention Held in Seneca Falls, N.Y., July 19th and 20th, 1848* (Rochester: John Dick at North Star, 1848, facsimile edition, Seneca Falls Historical Society, 1975), [3], however, clearly stated that “the question was discussed throughout two entire days: the first day by women exclusively, the second day men participated in the deliberations.” No men’s names appeared in the minutes of the first day’s meeting, but the minutes noted that James Mott assumed the chair on Thursday morning, while Thomas M’Clintock chaired in the evening.

¹²⁹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Address by ECS on Woman’s Rights,” in Ann D. Gordon, ed. *Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, Vol. 1, *In the School of Anti-Slavery, 1840-1866*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 94-123; *Report of the Woman’s Rights Convention Held in Seneca Falls, N.Y.*, (Rochester, New York: John Dick at North Star, 1848), facsimile edition, Seneca Falls Historical Society, 1975, 12.

¹³⁰ *Report*, [3–4], 12.

himself a signer of the declaration, noted that after “spirited discussion,” the resolutions were passed “nearly as they were originally drawn up by the preliminary convention of women.”¹³¹

Stanton recalled that all resolutions passed unanimously except the ninth, drafted by Stanton herself, “urging the women of the country to secure to themselves the elective franchise.” Frederick Douglass gave a “brilliant defense” of woman’s right to vote, but, Stanton recalled, “he did not speak quite fast enough for me, nor say all I wanted said, and the first thing I knew I was on my feet defending the resolution, and in due time Douglass and I carried the whole convention.”¹³²

Most likely, opposition to woman suffrage at Seneca Falls came from Quaker abolitionists who themselves abstained from participation, including voting and paying taxes, in formal governmental institutions. Lucretia Mott reputedly was so surprised by Stanton’s demand that she said, “Lizzie, thou wilt make the convention ridiculous.” She reflected the attitude of Quakers such as Henry Bonnel, from Waterloo, who “suffered much from fines and imprisonment, and distraint of his goods” because he refused to pay taxes.¹³³

In contrast, Stanton had learned from political abolitionists about the power of the vote. She made her demand at Seneca Falls in the context of her own awareness of the importance of voting, stated as early as 1842, and reflecting as well the woman suffrage plank in the National Liberty Party’s platform, adopted in June 1848. It may well be that Stanton also had knowledge of petitions by French women in March for woman suffrage.¹³⁴

¹³¹Report, 11; Eliab W. Capron, *National Reformer*, August 3, 1848 (www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/images/vc006196.jpg).

¹³² Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:73; *International Council of Women*, 323–24; Margaret Stanton Lawrence, “Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 1815–1915,” 28–19, Stanton Papers, Vassar. Lawrence related a similar version of this story in “Who Was Elizabeth Cady Stanton? and Who Started Votes for Women? A Bit of Ancient History for the Girls of To-day,” by Mrs. Stanton’s Daughter, Margaret Stanton Lawrence,” typescript, n.d., Stanton Papers, Vassar, 7–8. Waldo E. Martin Jr. in *The Mind of Frederick Douglass* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 147–48, argued that “no aspect of his [Douglass’s] woman’s rights cause meant more to him than his pivotal support of woman’s right to vote at the Seneca Falls convention.” Frederick Douglass, “The Woman’s Suffrage Movement: Address Before Woman Suffrage Association, April 1888, in *Frederick Douglass on Women’s Rights*, Philip Foner, ed. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976, reprint New York: DaCapo, 2001), 109–15. Stanton’s accounts differed as to whether the convention passed the resolution unanimously or “by a small majority”; Eliab W. Capron, *National Reformer*, August 3, 1848 (from www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/images/vc006196.jpg).

¹³³ Tilton, “Elizabeth Cady Stanton,” 613–14; “History of the Bonnel Family,” Typescript, Waterloo Library and Historical Society. Mott’s reaction to Stanton’s suffrage proposal was confirmed in an 1869 letter from Stanton to Paulina Wright Davis, August 12? 1869: “Mrs. Hooker’s ‘oh! dear’ went straight to my heart, bless her, but it can’t be helped so said dear Lucretia Mott when I said suffrage in the first convention.” Ann D. Gordon, ed., *Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, Vol. 2: *Against an Aristocracy of Sex* (New Brunswick, New Jersey; Rutgers University Press, 2000), 257.

¹³⁴ *National Era*, June 24, 1847. For the platform of the Liberty League, see William Goodell, *Address of the Macedon Convention and Letters of Gerrit Smith* (Albany, New York: S.W. Green, 1847), see <http://library.syr.edu/digital/collections/g/GerritSmith/447.htm>; Report on the Liberty League convention from the *Liberator*, June 23, 1848, copied from the *New York Commercial Advertiser; Proceedings of the National Liberty Convention, Held at Buffalo, N.Y., June 14th and 15th, 1848* (Utica, New York: S.W. Green, 1848), 14. Karen Offen, “Women and the Question of ‘Universal’ Suffrage in 1848: A Transatlantic Comparison of Suffrage Rhetoric,” *NWSA Journal* 11 (Spring 1999): 1.

Lucretia Mott had urged Stanton to reserve her “great speech” for the second day, so that her husband James “and others may be able to hear it.” Stanton never seems to have given a major speech at the convention, however. She introduced the “object of the meeting” and the Declaration of Sentiments on Wednesday morning. On Thursday, she introduced the declaration to the public audience; in the afternoon, she defended her resolution on suffrage; and in the evening, she “volunteered” a speech “in defence [sic] of the many severe accusations brought against the much-abused ‘Lords of Creation.’” None of these talks appear to have been a formal speech. Considerable confusion has existed on this point because, in 1870, Robert Johnson published a speech purportedly given by Stanton at the Seneca Falls convention. Actually, Stanton gave this speech in various places after the convention. As Ann Gordon suggested, “Johnson’s publication is more likely an artifact of 1870 than a document of 1848.”¹³⁵

How many people actually attended the convention? We have the names of 100 people who signed the Declaration of Sentiments, as recorded in the *Report* of the convention, printed by John Dick of the *North Star* press in 1848. Eleanor Flexner estimated that 300 people attended the convention, but she gave no source for this figure. Amelia Bloomer, however, noted that she came to the convention late on the second day, Thursday, and that “the crowd was so immense,” that she had to take a seat in the upstairs gallery. Allowing for various people attending different gatherings, 300 people might easily have attended the convention at its several sessions.¹³⁶

Who were the people who attended the convention? Frederick Douglass, nationally known abolitionist orator and editor and the only known African American who signed the Declaration of Sentiments, remembered forty years later that “we were few in numbers, moderate in resources, and very little known in the world. The most that we had to commend us, was a firm conviction that we were in the right, and a firm faith that the right must ultimately prevail.” Given that only eight days elapsed between the first notice of the convention in the *Seneca County Courier* on July 11 and the first day of the convention on July 19, the majority of those who attended came from Seneca Falls, Waterloo, or the immediate surrounding area. Five people, including Douglass himself, came from Rochester, and six came from the Farmington/Macedon area, just east of Rochester. Two came from Spafford, about fifteen miles east of Seneca Falls.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Robert Johnson; Ellen Carol DuBois, ed., Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, *Correspondence, Writings and Speeches* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 27; *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Eighty Years and More: Reminiscences, 1815–1897* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 151. For more detailed discussion of this speech, see Ann D. Gordon, ed., *In the School of Anti-Slavery: Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, vol. 1 (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 94–95. Wellman, *Road to Seneca Falls*, recreated the convention in Chapter 8.

¹³⁶ *Report of the Woman's Rights Convention Held in Seneca Falls, N.Y., July 19th and 20th, 1848*; Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 76; Barbara Yocum and Terry L. Wong, Wesleyan Chapel: Historic Structure Report ([Washington, D.C.]: National Park Service, written 1988, published 1992), 9–10, 52–53; Amelia Bloomer, July 12, 1880, printed in the *Seneca Falls Reveille*, July 30, 1880. The chapel itself was about 43 feet wide by 64 feet long. There was room for about 200 feet of benches in the gallery (assuming two rows of benches in a space slightly larger than eight feet wide) and 362 feet of pews on the main floor. Allowing two feet of bench width per person, this would give seating for 100 people upstairs and 181 people downstairs, or 281 people altogether. If the church was full during the evening meetings, as seems likely from Amelia Bloomer's description, 250 or more people may have attended the evening services.

¹³⁷ Frederick Douglass, *International Council of Women*, 329.

Economic status did not predict of who would support women's rights. Signers of the Declaration of Sentiments ranged in wealth from Richard and Jane Hunt (very wealthy landowners, mill owners, and commercial developers) to those who owned no property at all. What did link these signers, however, were political connections, religious affiliations, and family networks.¹³⁸

The two groups of Free Soilers and reform Quakers—one political and one religious, one based in Seneca Falls and one centered in Waterloo and west—were especially important. More than one-third of the known signers of the Declaration of Sentiments were supporters of the emerging Free Soil Party in Seneca Falls. At least one-quarter of the signers were affiliated with Quaker abolitionists who had walked out of Genesee Yearly Meeting of Friends at Farmington in June and who met again in Farmington to form the Congregational Friends in October 1848.

Others also came as members of church groups. At least ten signers were affiliated, either as members or as relatives of members, with the Wesleyan Church. Ten more were affiliated with the Episcopal Church, including Stanton herself, who attended that church, although she considered herself a member of the Congregational Friends in the 1850s. Six signers were affiliated with the Seneca Falls Methodist Church.

Family links also brought signers together. At least 70 percent of the signers came with at least one other family member. Husbands came with wives, brothers with sisters, parents with children. Often, several members of the same family came together. Elizabeth Cady Stanton brought her sister Harriet Cady Eaton and her nephew Daniel Cady Eaton. The largest family group was that of the M'Clintock-Pryor-Hunt family. In all, eleven members of this extended family signed the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments.

Notably, many men signers were related not only to wives but also to sisters. Families of origin and, especially, sibling ties, remained important to these signers, even after marriage. Popular images of families in mainstream middle-class culture focused on the husband-wife bond as the essential basis for creating a family. For these signers, that husband-wife relationship was balanced by a large network of other lifelong, sustaining family relationships, based on inherently egalitarian ties between siblings.

Ideas about woman's rights and even woman suffrage had been heard in public places before 1848, but they reached a new national audience as a result of the Seneca Falls convention. By presenting the convention as a model for organization and the Declaration of Sentiments as a document of national significance, Seneca Falls created for the first time the nucleus of an identifiable woman's rights movement, transcending its roots in abolitionism, legal reform, and popular culture.

The Impact of Seneca Falls: Woman's Rights Conventions, 1848-70

Initial Reactions to Seneca Falls

A small minority of historians have suggested that the Seneca Falls convention was not particularly important in its own time. Andrea Moore Kerr, one of Lucy Stone's biographers, argued, for example, that until the fortieth anniversary celebration in 1888, "no particular symbolic significance had been accorded to the small meeting in upstate New York,

¹³⁸ This analysis is based on Judith Wellman, "The Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention: A Study of Social Networks," *Journal of Women's History* 3, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 9-36; Wellman, *Road to Seneca Falls*, 204-8.

occurring as it did almost simultaneously with similar meetings in Ohio and well after Stone had already begun to draw large crowds to her lectures on woman suffrage.”¹³⁹

Contemporaries, however, reacted very differently. Americans immediately recognized the historic nature of the Seneca Falls convention and the Declaration of Sentiments.

Word of Seneca Falls spread nationally through the press, beginning with three journalists who attended the convention: Frederick Douglass, editor of the abolitionist *North Star* in Rochester; Nathan Milliken, editor of the Free Soil *Seneca County Courier* in Seneca Falls; and Eliab W. Capron, editor of the *National Reformer* in Auburn. All signed the Declaration of Sentiments; all reported on the proceedings; and all recognized that they had participated in a historic event. Major national newspapers, including the *New York Tribune*, immediately spread the story across the country.

On July 21, the day after the convention closed, Nathan Milliken, editor of the *Seneca County Courier*, was the first to report on the meeting. He described it as “novel in its character. . . .The doctrines broached in it are startling to those who are wedded to the present usages and laws of society,” and the resolutions were “spirited and spicy, . . . of the kind called radical.”¹⁴⁰

On July 28, Frederick Douglass declared that Seneca Falls was an “extraordinary meeting,” and the Declaration of Sentiments was “the basis of a grand movement for attaining all the civil, social, political, and religious rights of woman.” Douglass continued,

[T]heir whole proceedings were characterized by marked ability and dignity. No one present . . . will fail to give them credit for brilliant talent and excellent dispositions. In this meeting, as in other deliberative assemblies, there were frequently differences of opinion and animated discussion; but in no case was there the slightest absence of good feeling and decorum.

Douglass fully supported the goals of the convention. “In respect to political rights, we hold woman to be justly entitled to all we claim for man,” he asserted.

All political rights which it is expedient for man to exercise, it is equally so for woman. . . . There can be no reason in the world for denying to woman the right of the elective franchise, or a hand in making and administering the laws of the land. Our doctrine is, that “Right is of no Sex.” We therefore bid the women engaged in this movement our humble God-speed.”¹⁴¹

On August 3, in the *National Reformer*, Eliab W. Capron called the event “one of the most interesting conventions of this conventional age. . . . This convention . . . forms an era in the progress of the age; it being the first convention of the kind ever held, and one whose influence shall not cease until woman is guarantied [sic] all the rights now enjoyed by the other half of creation—Social, Civil, and POLITICAL”¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Andrea Moore Kerr, *Lucy Stone: Speaking Out for Equality* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 225.

¹⁴⁰ *Seneca County Courier*, July 21, 1848.

¹⁴¹ Frederick Douglass, *North Star*, July 28, 1848.

¹⁴² Eliab W. Capron, *National Reformer*, August 3, 1848 (www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/images/vc006196.jpg).

In hindsight, Stanton confirmed these initial impressions. She remembered her elation at the “grand success” of the meeting. “The house was crowded at every session, the speaking good, and a religious earnestness dignified all the proceedings.”¹⁴³

Editors across the country picked up the story. Some of them reported favorably. James Gordon Bennett, in the influential *New York Herald*, noted :

This is the age of revolutions. . . . By the intelligence, however, which we have lately received, the work of revolution is no longer confined to the Old World, nor to the masculine gender. The flag of independence has been hoisted, for the second time, on this side of the Atlantic; and a solemn league and covenant has just been entered into by a Convention of women at Seneca Falls.

Bennett concluded that “We are much mistaken, if Lucretia Mott would not make a better President than some of those who have lately tenanted the White House.” Elizabeth Cady Stanton was delighted with Bennett: “Imagine the publicity given to our ideas by thus appearing in a widely-circulated sheet like the *Herald*,” she wrote to Mott. “I fully agree with Mr. Bennett’s closing lines, even if you may not.” Since Mott had, in fact, received five votes for vice president at the National Liberty Party’s convention in June, James Gordon Bennett’s suggestion was not as outrageous as it might have seemed.¹⁴⁴

Many followed the lead of Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune*:

When a sincere republican is asked to say in sober earnest what adequate reason he can give, for refusing the demand of women to an equal participation with men in political rights, he must answer, None at all. . . . However unwise and mistaken the demand, it is but the assertion of a natural right, and such must be conceded.¹⁴⁵

Some of the most memorable commentators opposed woman’s rights. The *Mechanic’s Advocate* of Albany, New York, thought that the idea of woman’s rights was “all wrong.” If men performed “an equal share of the domestic duties,” this would “set the world by the ears . . . and prove a monstrous injury to all mankind.” The *Oneida Whig* asked,

Was there ever such a dreadful revolt? . . . This bolt is the most shocking and unnatural ever recorded in the history of womanity. If our ladies will insist on voting and legislating, where, gentlemen, will be our dinners and our elbows? where our domestic firesides and the holes in our stockings?

In Philadelphia, the *Public Ledger and Daily Transcript* argued that

a woman is nobody. A wife is everything. A pretty girl is equal to ten thousand men, and a mother is, next to God, all powerful. . . . The ladies of Philadelphia, therefore, . . . are resolved to maintain their rights as Wives, Belles, Virgins, and Mothers, and not as Women.

¹⁴³ Stanton, *Eighty Years*, 94; Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:73.

¹⁴⁴ Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:805; Stanton to Mott, 30 September 1848; Beverly Palmer, ed., *Selected Letters of Lucretia Coffin Mott*, 174, quoted from *Stanton-Anthony Papers*, reel 6, 777–78.

¹⁴⁵ Horace Greeley, editorial, *New York Tribune*, quoted in Alma Lutz, *Created Equal: A Biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (New York: The John Day Company, 1940), 52.

The *Lowell Courier* complained that the ideas expressed at Seneca Falls would lead to a reversal in gender roles. "The lords" must

wash dishes, scour up, be put to the tub, handle the broom, darn stockings, patch breeches, scold the servants, dress in the latest fashion, wear trinkets, look beautiful, and be as fascinating as those blessed morsels of humanity whom God gave to preserve that rough animal man, in something like a reasonable civilization.¹⁴⁶

Stanton recalled that the convention was "unsparingly ridiculed by the press," but historian Timothy Terpstra's review of seventy-nine newspapers nationwide suggested otherwise. Of 58 articles about Seneca Falls, 29 percent gave positive reports, 42 percent were negative, and 28 percent were neutral.¹⁴⁷

Locally, some signers faltered after their initial enthusiasm. "So pronounced was the popular voice against us, in the parlor, press, and pulpit," Stanton noted, "that most of the ladies who had attended the convention and signed the declaration, one by one, withdrew their names and influence and joined our persecutors." We have no way of knowing how accurate Stanton's recollections were. It is unlikely that Quaker signers withdrew their names. Perhaps Stanton's reference to "ladies" suggested that those who withdrew their names were more conscious of their social position than they were of their commitment to reform.¹⁴⁸

One of their persecutors was Rev. Horace P. Bogue, the Presbyterian minister in Seneca Falls. The Sunday following the convention, July 23, Bogue preached a sermon against woman's rights. He underestimated his opponents. Sitting in the audience, taking copious notes, were Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Elizabeth M'Clintock. Their notes became the basis for a letter to the *Seneca County Courier* in which they countered Bogue's assertion that "the Bible is filled with the doctrine of woman's subjection." In fact, they argued, "the Bible is the great Charter of human rights, when it is taken in its true spiritual meaning." Christians must obey the injunction that there is "neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, bound nor free, but all are one in Christ Jesus." Stanton and M'Clintock concluded:

One consolation was given us, one ray of light allowed to pierce the gloom, one golden edge to the dark cloud. We are told that it may be, the order will be reversed in Heaven; that the precedence will there be accorded to woman as here it has been to man. If this be the Heavenly order is it not the duty of every Christian to endeavor to render Earth as near like Heaven as possible?¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:802–4; *Oneida Whig*, August 1, 1848.

¹⁴⁷ St. Louis *Daily Reveille*, August 11, 1848, quoted in Timothy Terpstra, "The 1848 Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Convention: Initial American Public Reaction" (master's thesis, Mississippi State University, 1975), 54, 56–7, 59–60, 68–69; Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage* 1:72; Lutz, *Created Equal*, 52.

¹⁴⁸ Stanton, *Eighty Years* (reprint, New York: Schocken Books, 1971, 149); Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:72, indicated that "The Declaration was signed by one hundred men, and women, many of whom withdrew their names as soon as the storm of ridicule began to break." Eliab W. Capron also mentioned that "one hundred persons or more" attached their names to the declaration, so we can assume that these ladies are included in the list of people whose names were printed as signers in the *Minutes* of the convention. *National Reformer*, August 3, 1848 (from www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/images/vc006196.jpg).

The reaction of at least some ordinary women was immediate and positive. Emily Collins, who lived in South Bristol, Ontario County, New York, about twenty-five miles west of Seneca Falls, reported that Seneca Falls gave “form and voice” to her “feeling of unrest” and her desire for “freedom of thought and action that was then denied to all womankind.”

Raised an abolitionist, Collins translated egalitarian ideals into woman's rights language. “All through the Anti-Slavery struggle, every word of denunciation of the wrongs of the Southern slave, was, I felt, equally applicable to the wrongs of my own sex,” she recalled.

Every argument for the emancipation of the colored man, was equally one for that of woman; and I was surprised that all Abolitionists did not see the similarity in the condition of the two classes. . . . But, it was the proceedings of the Convention, in 1848, at Seneca Falls, that first gave a direction to the efforts of the many women, who began to feel the degradation of their subject condition, and its baneful effects upon the human race. They then saw the necessity for associated action, in order to obtain the elective franchise, the only key that would unlock the doors of their prison.¹⁵⁰

On October 19, 1848, Collins formed a Woman's Equal Rights Union that met every other week with fifteen or twenty members. “Every lady of any worth or intelligence adopts unhesitatingly our view, and concurs in our measures,” Collins reported to Sarah C. Owen, secretary of the Women's Protective Union in Rochester and an organizer of the Rochester woman's rights convention, held September 23, 1848.¹⁵¹

At Oberlin College in Ohio, Antoinette Brown discussed the report of the Seneca Falls convention in the Ladies Literary Society, a group that she, Lucy Stone, and others had reactivated in 1846. They met at the home of an African American woman in town, to avoid detection by the Ladies Board of Oberlin, which did not approve of women learning to speak in public. Brown and Stone were, however, committed to woman's rights, even if Oberlin was not. In the winter of 1847, Brown wrote to Stone from the Rochester Academy, where she was teaching, “[W]e are all getting to be Woman's Rights Advocates.”¹⁵²

Organizing a Woman's Rights Movement After Seneca Falls

The Declaration of Sentiments ended with a commitment to “employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the State and national Legislatures, and endeavor to enlist the pulpit and the press in our behalf,” as well as for “a series of Conventions, embracing every part of the country.” Those who had attended the Seneca Falls convention immediately began to organize a woman's rights movement, using these strategies.

¹⁴⁹ Minutes of the Rochester convention, *North Star*, August 11, 1848; *Eighty Years*, 152; Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Elizabeth M'Clintock to the Editors, *Seneca County Courier*, [after July 23, 1848] in Gordon, *Selected Papers*, 1:88–94.

¹⁵⁰ Emily Collins, “Reminiscences,” in Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:89–90.

¹⁵¹ Collins, in Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:91.

¹⁵² Elizabeth Cazden, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell* (Old Westbury, New York: Feminist Press, 1983), 28–29.

Rochester Woman's Rights Convention: August 1848

On August 2, Amy Post and other Rochester women organized a second convention at the Unitarian Church in Rochester. Several signers of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments played active roles. Amy Post convened the meeting. Sarah L. Hallowell, Mary H. Hallowell, and Catharine A.F. Stebbins were secretaries. Frederick Douglass, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth and Mary Ann M'Clintock, and Stanton herself attended. So did other members of the dissident Quaker group who had left Genesee Yearly Meeting of Friends in June, including Rhoda de Garmo, Sarah D. Fish, and members of the Anthony family. The Rochester convention created precedent by electing a woman, Abigail Bush, as president, and also by focusing on wages and working conditions for women, including seamstresses and domestics. William C. Nell, African American abolitionist who worked in the *Liberator* office, joined Douglass in advocating woman's rights. The convention heard selections from the 1837 *Clerical Appeal*; from Maria Weston Chapman's satirical response, "The Times that Try Men's Souls"; and from a letter from William Lloyd Garrison. They endorsed the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments, with only one man objecting that "there was too much truth in it!"¹⁵³

On September 24, 1848, Stanton wrote to Amy Post that "our conventions both went off so well that we have great encouragement to go on. What are we next to do?—We have declared our right to vote—The question now is how shall we get possession of what rightfully belongs to us?"¹⁵⁴

Employing an Agent

Stanton's first suggestion was to employ an agent. "Do you think we ought to have an agent to travel all over the country & lecture on this subject?" Stanton asked. "Lucy Stone I think might be engaged for that purpose. . . . I have understood she said she wished to devote herself to the cause of woman. Do any of the Rochester friends know her personally? If so it would be well to ascertain how she feels on this subject." In November, Phoebe Hathaway wrote to Stanton from Farmington:

Thou wilt be glad to hear she [Stone] can come to this state so much sooner than she expected. Perhaps thou hast written her before this, and told her something definite relative to the plans of the society. I have written her but once, and then little more than to ask her if she would be willing to enter this field, and if so, upon what terms. I suppose she wishes to know definitely what her work is to be, and as nearly as possible where.¹⁵⁵

In South Bristol, Emily Collins highlighted her concern about paying for an agent:

A lecturer in the field would be most desirable; but how to raise funds to sustain one is the question. I never really wished for Aladdin's lamp till now. Would to Heaven that women could be persuaded to use the funds they acquire by their sewing-circles and fairs, in trying

¹⁵³ *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at the Unitarian Church, Rochester, N.Y., August 2, 1848, To Consider the Rights of Woman, Politically, Religiously and Industrially, Revised by Mrs. Amy Post* (New York: Robert J. Johnston, 1870), [3]; Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Amy Post, September 24, [1848], in Gordon, *Selected Papers*, 1:123–24.

¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Amy Post, September 24, 1848, Gordon, *Selected Papers*, 1:123–24.

¹⁵⁵ Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Amy Post, September 24, 1848, in Gordon, *Selected Papers*, 1:123–24; Phoebe Hathaway to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, November 11, 1848, in Gordon, *Selected Papers*, 1:132.

to raise their own condition above that of “infants, idiots, and lunatics,” with whom our statutes class them, instead of spending the money in decorating their churches, or sustaining a clergy, the most of whom are striving to rivet the chains still closer that bind, not only our own sex, but the oppressed of every class and color.¹⁵⁶

Lucy Stone, everyone agreed, was the obvious choice. Well known for her commitment to woman's rights, Stone had graduated from Oberlin College in August 1847. She gave her first woman's rights lectures in Massachusetts that fall. Beginning in June 1848, she lectured throughout New England as an agent for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, but the invitation from western New York was Stone's first opportunity to work as a paid lecturer for a woman's rights group. Lucy Stone accepted the invitation from the New York group, although for some reason, she did not come to New York State in summer 1849 as she had planned. She did, however, go to Philadelphia in May 1849, at the invitation of Lucretia Mott.¹⁵⁷

The woman's rights movement never established a formal agency system like the American Anti-Slavery Society. Until the establishment of the Francis Jackson Fund in 1858 (administered by Wendell Phillips, Susan B. Anthony, and Lucy Stone), woman's rights speakers generally supported themselves with proceeds from their own speeches. Antoinette Brown Blackwell and others received fees (sometimes very large ones) for their lectures. Lucy Stone also worked part time for the American Anti-Slavery Society.

At Seneca Falls, Lucretia Mott, experienced as a Quaker minister, began to find her voice as a woman's rights advocate. At the convention, she had expressed her concern that woman's rights not be viewed in isolation either from other reforms or from male reformers. The convention, she noted, was “a beginning, & we may hope in due time will be followed by one of a more general character.” She made a special effort to ask men to state their reactions and comments. Afterwards, however, she began to give lectures herself specifically on woman's rights, including one at Seneca Falls, probably in the Wesleyan Chapel, on June 6, 1849. In December 1849, she gave her famous “Discourse on Woman” in Philadelphia. Her voice became a powerful beacon for the rights of women, as it continued to be for African Americans, Native Americans, and prisoners.¹⁵⁸

Publishing Tracts

Early woman's rights advocates typically published minutes of their conventions as small tracts. The Seneca Falls women used the *Report of the Woman's Rights Convention Held in Seneca Falls, N.Y., July 19th and 20th 1848*, printed by Frederick Douglass' *North Star* press. Martha Wright distributed about a dozen copies, some to her neighbors in Auburn and some to Lucretia Mott in Philadelphia, who sent one to friends in England. Stanton inscribed hers:

¹⁵⁶ Collins, “Reminiscences,” *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:92.

¹⁵⁷ Joelle Million, *Woman's Voice, Woman's Place, Lucy Stone and the Birth of the Woman's Rights Movement* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003), Chapters 9 and 10; Lucy Stone to Helen Cook, [December 1848], noted in Million, *Woman's Voice, Woman's Place*, 292, fn. 23.

¹⁵⁸ Lucretia Mott to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, July 16, 1848; Lucretia Mott to James Mott, ca. June 4 and 20, 1849, Garrison Family Papers, Smith College. Mott spoke in Seneca Falls on the “Rights of Women” on June 6, 1849, *New York Tribune*, June 18, 1849, noted in *North Star*, June 29, 1849; “Lecture on Women,” in *Lucretia Mott: Her Complete Speeches and Sermons*, Dana Greene, ed. (New York: Edmund Mellon Press, 1980).

“Read and circulate.” The first national convention, held in Worcester, sent copies of its own report to Europe as well as across the country.¹⁵⁹

The West Chester, Pennsylvania, convention in 1852 published its Declaration of Sentiments, written by Ann Preston, in tract form. In 1853, Syracuse woman's rights advocates published a series of sixteen woman's rights talks, with contributions by Wendell Phillips, Matilda Joslyn Gage, Samuel J. May, Paulina W. Davis, Harriot K. Hunt, Elizabeth Oakes Prince Smith, Clarina Irene Howard Nichols, Angelina Grimké, Ernestine Rose, Harriet Taylor, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.¹⁶⁰

In 1870, Stanton and Anthony and their allies revived the idea of tracts and printed several with Robert Johnson, including a reprint of Samuel J. May's sermon on woman's rights from 1846, a speech by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, purported (wrongly) to be the one that she gave at the Seneca Falls convention, and the minutes of the 1848 Rochester convention.¹⁶¹

Signing Petitions

Taking a lesson from abolitionism and the legal reform movement, women's rights advocates used petitions as one of the most effective methods of organizing women's political activity and influencing legislative action. Without the ability to vote or hold office, presenting petitions assumed critical importance as a way of entering legislative halls. Beginning at least as early as 1836, women sent many petitions to the New York State legislature (and at least three to the state's 1846 constitutional convention) on behalf of the married woman's property act. Nationwide, women signed an estimated three million signatures to antislavery petitions between 1835 and 1860.

Stanton began collecting petitions for woman's rights in the fall of 1848. In October, she asked people at the organizational meeting of the Congregational Friends in the Farmington Quaker meetinghouse to sign a petition on behalf of woman suffrage. In spite of making her plea in a center of nonpolitical abolitionists, at least one local resident, Benjamin Gue, signed.¹⁶²

Emily Collins, in South Bristol, New York, embraced petitions in a major way. “The elective franchise is now the one object for which we must labor,” she wrote to Sarah C. Owen in Rochester on October 23, 1848. “Please forward me a copy of the petition for suffrage. We will engage to do all we can, not only in our own town, but in the adjoining ones of Richmond, East Bloomfield, Canandaigua, and Naples. I have promises of aid from people of influence in obtaining signatures.”¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Wright to Mott, October 1, 1848, and October 16, 1848, Garrison Papers, Smith; Mott to Webbs, September 10, 1848, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Davis, *Twenty Years*, 16.

¹⁶⁰ *The Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Syracuse, September 8th, 9th and 10th, 1852* (Syracuse, New York: J.E. Masters, 1852), 14; *Woman's rights commensurate with her capacities and obligations: a series of tracts, comprising sixteen articles, essays, addresses, or letters of the prominent advocates of woman's larger sphere of action* (Syracuse, New York, 1853).

¹⁶¹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Address of Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Delivered at Seneca Falls & Rochester, N.Y., July 19th and Aug. 2d, 1848* (New York: Robert J. Johnson, 1870); *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, held at the Unitarian Church, Rochester, N.Y., August 2, 1848* (New York: R.J. Johnson, 1870). Samuel J. May, “*The rights and condition of women! A sermon delivered November 8th, 1846* (San Francisco, California: Republished by California Woman Suffrage Association, 1871).

¹⁶² Gue, *Diary of Benjamin F. Gue*, 40.

"We introduced the question into the Debating Clubs, that were in those days such popular institutions in the rural districts," Collins remembered, "and in every way sought to agitate the subject. I found a great many men, especially those of the better class, disposed to accord equal rights to our sex." Collins' group obtained sixty-two names "of the most intelligent people, male and female," on their suffrage petition. When they sent it to Albany, "it was received by the Legislature as something absurdly ridiculous, and laid upon the table."¹⁶⁴

Petitioning spread quickly. Even nonvoting abolitionists began to petition for woman suffrage. In the winter of 1848–49, William Lloyd Garrison was involved in "signing and circulating in Massachusetts the earliest petitions for woman suffrage," affirming that "the denial of the elective franchise to women in this Commonwealth, on account of their sex, is an act of folly, injustice, usurpation, and tyranny, which ought no longer to be persisted in." Although Garrison's signature headed the first petition, Joelle Million credits Lucy Stone with initiating this petition drive.¹⁶⁵

By 1850, the petition movement was in full gear. Women generated 7,901 signatures to petitions for "Equal Rights" and 2,106 signatures to petitions for suffrage to send to the state constitutional convention in Ohio in 1850.¹⁶⁶

Petitioning was not always easy. In 1850, Martha Wright complained that "I must answer a letter from Mrs. Stanton which I received a few days hence, requesting me to *take charge* of this District and procure signees to a petition for the right of Suffrage for Women. What on earth shall I tell her? I should smile to see myself trotting round with a petition through this benighted region, where there are not three women who would consider it safe to touch such a petition unfumigated."¹⁶⁷

Difficult as it might be to obtain signatures, petitioning was effective in raising public awareness, if not in achieving legislative results. In the 1850s, petitions became one of the most powerful ways of organizing the new movement. Just as antislavery petitions had connected women to political action on a national level, woman's rights petitions provided the ideal vehicle for connecting ordinary women with the state and national movement, giving lecturers a chance to explain specific goals and relating women's real-life experiences to larger theoretical issues.

In 1854, for example, Susan B. Anthony found one woman to act as captain for every county in New York, to get signatures on petitions for women's right to keep their children in case of divorce, control their wages, and vote. Anthony planned a woman's rights convention in Albany while the legislature was in session. Although it is often reported that Elizabeth Cady Stanton spoke before the legislature in 1854, and was the first woman in New York State to do so, she did not. She gave a speech at the Albany woman's rights meeting, and the women laid a copy of her talk on the desk of each legislator. In December 1854, Anthony started off alone on a petition campaign with \$50 lent to her by Wendell Phillips. After a grueling winter traveling through fifty-four of New York's sixty counties, she returned in

¹⁶³ Collins, "Reminiscences," *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:91–92.

¹⁶⁴ Collins, "Reminiscences," *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1, 93.

¹⁶⁵ William Lloyd Garrison, *1805–1879: The Story of His Life told by His Children* (New York: The Century Company, 1885–89), 262; Million, *Woman's Voice, Woman's Place*, 99.

¹⁶⁶ Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1, 122.

¹⁶⁷ Martha Wright to Lucretia Mott, December 9, 1850, quoted in Sherry H. Penney and James D. Livingston, *A Very Dangerous Woman: Martha Wright and Women's Rights* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 100.

May 1855, having spent \$2,291 and collected \$2,367, leaving a surplus of \$76. The New York Assembly received these petitions, collected at such personal cost, with laughter and sarcasm.¹⁶⁸

In 1863, the petition campaign transcended state boundaries and became a national movement. Stanton, Anthony, and others—suspending woman's rights agitation—organized the Women's Loyal National League, whose sole object was to send a petition to Congress signed by one million women on behalf of abolishing slavery. They managed to collect four hundred thousand signatures.¹⁶⁹

Enlisting Pulpit and Press

Press reaction to the Seneca Falls convention, although not always positive, was widespread. Editors picked up the Declaration of Sentiments as a document that encapsulated their highest hopes (or their worst fears). Whatever the content of their response, the fact that the popular press covered the Seneca Falls convention nationally was the single most important reason for the convention's national influence.

Woman's rights advocates from Seneca Falls immediately began to exploit the power of the press. Sometime after July 23, Stanton and Elizabeth M'Clintock published their response to Rev. Horace P. Bogue's sermon in the *Seneca County Courier*. In September, Stanton wrote a letter to George Cooper, editor of the *National Reformer* in Rochester. "If God has assigned a sphere to man and one to woman," she argued, "we claim the right to judge ourselves of his design in reference to us. . . . We think a man has quite enough in this life to find out his own individual calling, without being taxed to decide where every woman belongs. . . . There is no such thing as a sphere for a sex."

Stanton continued to write for newspapers for the rest of her life, beginning in the 1850s with several articles in the *New York Tribune*. But she was certainly not alone. The *Tribune* opened its pages to other women journalists, including Margaret Fuller, who became the country's first foreign correspondent in 1848.¹⁷⁰

In her 1870 history of the movement, Paulina Wright Davis recognized the importance of the press, even the hostile press, in promoting the woman's rights movement:

From North to South, the press found these earnest workers wonderfully ridiculous people. The "hen convention," was served up in every variety of style, till refined women dreaded to look into a newspaper. Hitherto man had assumed to be the conscience of woman, now she indicated the will to think for herself; hence all this odium. But, however the word was preached, whether for wrath or conscience sake, we rejoiced and thanked God.¹⁷¹

Women's issues became standard fare in the popular press in the mid-nineteenth century, and woman's rights advocates took full advantage to agitate for their cause. Women themselves edited newspapers before 1848. Lydia Maria Child edited the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. Margaret Fuller edited the *Dial*. Sarah Josepha Hale edited *Godey's Ladies Book* from 1841 to 1877. Women edited two political newspapers in the 1840s—the

¹⁶⁸ Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 87–88; Ann D. Gordon, e-mail message to author, October 2006.

¹⁶⁹ "Women's Loyal National League, Organized in the City of New York, May 14, 1863," Gordon, ed., *Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, 1:498.

¹⁷⁰ Elizabeth Cady Stanton to the *National Reformer*, September 14, 1848, Stanton Papers, Douglass College.

¹⁷¹ Davis, *Twenty Years*, 16.

Pittsburgh Saturday Visiter [sic], edited by Jane Swisshelm, and the *Wyndham County Democrat*, of Brattleboro, Vermont, edited by Clarina I.H. Nichols.

After the Seneca Falls convention, woman's rights advocates in central New York began to debate the idea of a press devoted specifically to woman's rights. "A press entirely devoted to our cause seems indispensable," Emily Collins of South Bristol wrote to Sarah C. Owen of Rochester on September 23. "If there is none such, can you tell me of any paper that advocates our claims more warmly than the *North Star*?"¹⁷²

Women began to publish their own reform newspapers in 1848, beginning with *The Lily*, edited by Amelia Bloomer, first in Seneca Falls and later in Iowa. *The Lily* began as a temperance newspaper but quickly began to espouse woman's rights ideas, with a masthead that read "Devoted to the Interests of Women." The first paper devoted specifically to woman's rights was the *Una*, edited by Paulina Wright Davis from 1853 to 1856. The *Woman's Advocate*, edited by Anna McDowell, was printed entirely by women. Lydia Sayer Hasbrouck published the *Sybil*. From 1868 to 1870, Stanton and Anthony published the *Revolution*. The *Ohio Woman's Advocate* and the *Agitator* merged into the *Woman's Journal*, published in Boston, which became the longest-lived woman's rights paper of the movement. Smaller papers included the *Pioneer*, edited by Emily Stevens in California, and the *New World*, edited by Paulina Wright Davis and Kate Stanton in Rhode Island.¹⁷³

Organizing Conventions

Between 1848 and the Civil War, conventions became the backbone of the woman's rights movement. Vivian Gornick suggested that "the women's rights convention of the 1850s was a piece of genius. It was to nineteenth-century feminism what consciousness-raising was to the twentieth."¹⁷⁴

As Stephen Buechler argued,

The Seneca Falls convention of 1848 has attracted much attention, but its greatest significance may well be that it was the first in that series of conventions. Just two weeks after Seneca Falls, women convened again in Rochester, New York, and within two years women's rights conventions were held as far west as Salem, Ohio. In 1850, the first national convention was held in Worcester, Massachusetts. With the exception of 1857, national conventions were held annually during the 1850s, with many smaller gatherings scattered throughout the New England and mid-Atlantic states. The conventions were coordinated by a loosely organized central committee of prominent women, which functioned throughout this period but which never mobilized itself into a formal social movement organization. Although their organization remained informal, there is strong evidence that these women's rights conventions were the crucial foundation underpinning women's rights activity before the Civil War.¹⁷⁵

The earliest conventions were associated with reform Quakers. Friends who had left Genesee Yearly Meeting in June 1848 organized, in alliance with other woman's

¹⁷² Collins, "Reminiscences," *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:91.

¹⁷³ Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 82; Paulina Wright Davis, *Twenty Years*, 20, 23; Sylvia Hoffert, *If a Hen Can Crow, Let Her Crow*.

¹⁷⁴ Vivian Gornick, "Woman Suffrage's 'Long March,'" *Women's Review of Books* 23, no. 2 (March/April 2006): 8.

¹⁷⁵ Stephen Buechler, *Women's Movements in the United States: Woman Suffrage, Equal Rights, and Beyond* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 46–47.

rights advocates, both the Seneca Falls and Rochester conventions. On October 5–6, this group met again at Farmington in Ontario County to organize the Congregational Friends. Thomas M'Clintock, a signer of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and a member of Junius Monthly Meeting of Friends, wrote the founding document, *The Basis of Religious Association*.¹⁷⁶

Stanton gave her first major talk on woman's rights not at Seneca Falls but at a meeting of Friends at the Junius Friends meetinghouse in Waterloo in September 1848. Lucretia Mott noted in a letter to Stanton on October 3, 1848, that

Richard Hunt speaks very favorably of thy Maiden Speech at Waterloo. He says some of their respectable inhabitants were well pleased—He would have preferred the head-dress a little different—It looked rather Theatrical he thought—"a kind of turban & bows"—When thou comes here we can give thee an example of Quaker simplicity. I rejoiced however, that thou wast willing to deliver that lecture—& hope thy talents in that way will be well "exercised by reason of use."¹⁷⁷

Stanton repeated this talk in October 1848, at Farmington, New York, at the organizational meeting of the Congregational Friends. Benjamin Gue noted that he went to a woman's rights meeting held "in the large meeting house, . . . attended by Elizabeth C. Stanton of Seneca Falls, she circulated a petition praying the Legislature to allow women of legal age to exercise the right of the Elective Franchise, which I signed." After one of these meetings, Stanton seemed to have made at least one convert. Henry Bonnel, a nonvoting Quaker who had not signed the declaration at Seneca Falls, concluded in a singsong voice that "if a hen can crow, let her crow."¹⁷⁸

The earliest local and regional woman's rights meetings were all set up by liberal Quakers, beginning with the Rochester convention and followed by a meeting in Philadelphia, organized by Lucretia Mott. Mott had tried to organize a woman's rights convention in Philadelphia in fall 1848 but found it "far more difficult than we found it out West." Mott finally managed to pull together a meeting, apparently not a full convention, at Franklin Hall in Philadelphia on May 4, 1849, with Lucy Stone as a key speaker. "Lucy Stone is an acquisition to our [antislavery] ranks," noted Mott. "She is such a thorough woman's rights woman, too. We had a nice Meeting on that subject while she was in this City."¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Waterloo Yearly Meeting of Friends, *Proceedings* (1853), 21–24, reprinted in Albert Wahl, "The Congregational or Progressive Friends in the Pre-Civil War Reform Movement" (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1951).

¹⁷⁷ Ann D. Gordon, ed., *Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, 1:94–123, 126–130; Beverly Wilson Palmer, ed., *Selected Letters of Lucretia Coffin Mott* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2002), 172–74.

¹⁷⁸ Gordon, ed., *Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, 1:94–95. Gue, *Diary of Benjamin F. Gue*, 40; Stanton, *Eighty Years and More*, 151; Christopher Densmore, the major authority on the Congregational Friends, identified Henry Bonnel as the author of this statement through Bonnel's obituary, *Free Thought Magazine* 13 (1895), 49–50; Christopher Densmore, "Forty-seven Years Before the Woman's Bible," Woman's Bible Centennial Conference, Seneca Falls, N.Y., November 4, 1995, <http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/units/archives/urr/WNYWHO.html>.

¹⁷⁹ Lucretia Mott to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, October 3, 1848, and Lucretia Mott to Richard D. and Hannah Webb, 5th Month 14th, 1849, Beverly Wilson Palmer, ed., *Selected Letters of Lucretia Coffin Mott*, 172, 184; Million, *Woman's Voice, Woman's Place*, 100.

Congregational Friends continued to play important roles in the woman's rights movement nationally. Across the Northeast, Quakers formed sixteen new meetings of Congregational Friends on the reform principles of the *Basis of Religious Association*. Annual meetings of Congregational Friends (later called Progressive Friends or Friends of Human Progress) were essentially reform conventions, hosting speakers for woman's rights as well as abolitionism, temperance, and peace.¹⁸⁰

In 1849 and 1850, Congregational Friends at Waterloo, New York, and Green Plain, Ohio, endorsed woman's rights at their annual meetings. At Waterloo in 1850, they adopted an "Address to the Women of the State of New York," echoing Sarah Grimké's earlier essay that "What *man* has a right to do, *woman* has a right to do, and *she herself* is to be the judge of the propriety and expediency of any course of action. . . . In no other way can she be true to the world, herself, or her God." Congregational Friends also played prominent roles in the first statewide convention in the country, held at Salem, Ohio, in 1850, which held part of its convention in the Friends meetinghouse. Many Congregational Friends signed the call for the first national convention in Worcester, Massachusetts. And they organized the first woman's rights convention held in Pennsylvania, at Horticultural Hall in West Chester, in 1852.¹⁸¹

From 1850 through 1861, woman's rights advocates held a national convention every year except 1857. In New York, beginning in 1854, women began to hold two statewide conventions, one in Albany to coincide with the beginning of the legislative session, another in Saratoga Springs to bring the message of antislavery and woman's rights to Southerners who came for the horse racing season and vacations at the spa. In 1859–60, New York women held conventions in forty counties, with lectures in 150 towns and villages.¹⁸²

Throughout the 1850s and 1860s, Seneca Falls continued to be an inspiration for woman's rights activists, and participants in the Seneca Falls convention remained active in the movement. Conscious of their own history, woman's rights advocates at many conventions—notably those at Salem, Ohio, in 1850; West Chester, Pennsylvania, in 1852; Syracuse, New York, in 1852; Cleveland, Ohio, in 1853; Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1855; and New York City in 1858—incorporated overviews of the woman's rights movement and referred directly to Seneca Falls as the first woman's rights convention. The Cleveland convention in 1853 considered adopting the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments as its own declaration. Each convention considered themes directly related to those outlined at Seneca Falls.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Wahl, "Congregational or Progressive Friends," tells the most complete story of this group. The best collection of minutes of the Annual Meeting of Congregational Friends at Waterloo is in the local history collection of the Onondaga County Public Library.

¹⁸¹ Green Plain Yearly Meeting of Congregational Friends, *Minutes and Proceedings*, (1849), 3, and (1850), 5, and Waterloo Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends, *Proceedings* (1850), 13–18, quoted in Wahl, "Congregational or Progressive Friends," 182–86; Map of Congregational Friends meetings, in Wahl, "Congregational or Progressive Friends," after 40; Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:350.

¹⁸² For a contemporary review of work in New York State, see Anthony's summary in *Proceedings of the Tenth National Woman's Rights Convention, Held at the Cooper Institute, New York City, May 10th and 11th, 1860* (Boston: Yerrinton & Garrison, 1860), 6–7.

¹⁸³ Women's Rights National Historical Park, in conjunction with the Worcester Women's History Project, sponsored an exhibit on conventions from 1848 to 1863, "Declarations of Independence: National Women's Rights Conventions, 1850–1863," with text prepared by Carolyn Howe and students of Holy Cross College and Vivien Rose, Chief of Interpretation, Women's Rights National Historical Park. The exhibit was developed in honor of the first two national woman's rights

In 1850, the first statewide convention met in Salem, Ohio, at the Second Baptist Church and the Friends Meetinghouse on April 19–20. The Salem convention was characterized by three important differences from Seneca Falls. First, it was held in the context of a forthcoming Ohio state constitutional convention. Second, Salem women decided not to let men speak. Third, the convention reflected abolitionism as well as woman's rights, focusing on "Equal Rights, and the extension of the privileges of Government, without distinction of sex or color." Jane Elizabeth Jones, Betsey Mix Cowles, and Mary Anne W. Johnson played prominent roles. Jones gave a major address, in which she highlighted both people in slavery and women:

[T]he colored man is a human being, and as such, entitled to the free exercise of all the rights which belong to humanity. And we should demand *our* recognition as equal members of the human family: as persons to whom pertain all the rights which grow out of our relations to God, and to each other, as human beings: and when this point is once established, the term "Woman's Rights" will become obsolete, for none will entertain the idea that the rights of women differ from the rights of men. It is then *human* rights for which we contend.¹⁸⁴

Resolution 6 made the comparison explicit:

Resolved, That in those laws which confer on man the power to control the property and person of woman, and to remove from her at will the children of her affection, we recognize only the modified code of the slave plantation; and that thus we are brought more nearly in sympathy with the suffering slave, who is despoiled of all his rights.¹⁸⁵

The Salem convention also reflected the influence of Seneca Falls. Stanton and Mott, along with Lucy Stone and many others, sent letters to the convention, and delegates heard Mott's "Discourse on Woman." In the context of the Ohio constitutional convention, Stanton emphasized the importance of the vote for women. "Having decided to petition for a redress of grievances," she wrote, "the question is *for what shall you first petition?* For the exercise of your right to the elective franchise—nothing short of this. The grant to you of this right will secure all others, and the granting of every other right, whilst this is denied, is a mockery."¹⁸⁶

Stanton's tone was upbeat, contrasting the situation of woman before Seneca Falls with that in 1850. "The cause of woman is onward," she cheered.

Not two years since, the women of New York held several Conventions. Their meetings were well attended by both men and women; and the question of woman's true position was fully and freely discussed. The proceedings of those meetings and their Declaration of Sentiments were all published and scattered far and near. Before that time, the newspapers said but little on that subject. Immediately after, there was scarcely a newspaper in the Union that did not notice these Conventions, and generally in a tone of ridicule. Now, you seldom take up a paper that has not something about woman; but the tone is changing—ridicule is giving way to reason. Our papers begin to see that this is no subject for mirth, but one for serious consideration. Our literature also is assuming a different tone. The heroine of our

conventions. Text of this exhibit is available at <http://www.nps.gov/wori/historyculture/more-womens-rights-conventions.htm>.

¹⁸⁴ *Proceedings of the Ohio Women's Convention, Held at Salem, April 19th and 20th, 1850, With an Address by J. Elizabeth Jones* (Cleveland, Ohio: Smead and Cowles Press, 1850), 3, 30. Neither building associated with the Salem woman's rights convention is still standing.

¹⁸⁵ *Proceedings of the Ohio Women's Convention*, 6.

¹⁸⁶ *Proceedings of the Ohio Women's Convention*, 15.

fashionable novel is now a being of spirit, of energy, of will, with a conscience, with high moral principle, great decision and self-reliance. . . . The women of Massachusetts, ever the first in all moral movements, have sent, but a few weeks since, to their Legislature, a petition demanding their right to vote and hold office in that State. Woman seems to be preparing herself for a higher and holier destiny. That same love of liberty which burned in the hearts of our sires, is now being kindled anew in the daughters of this proud Republic.¹⁸⁷

Resolutions and the convention's memorial echoed ideas from the Declaration of Independence and the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments. A selection from the preamble and the last resolution give a sample:

WHEREAS, all men are created equal and endowed with certain God-given rights, and all just government is derived from the consent of the governed . . .

8. *Resolved*, That all distinctions between men and women, in regard to social, literary, pecuniary, religious or political customs and institutions, based on a distinction of sex, are contrary to the laws of Nature, are unjust, and destructive to the purity, elevation and progress in knowledge and goodness of the great human family, and ought to be at once and forever abolished.

On October 23–24, 1850, women and men organized the first national woman's rights convention at Brinley Hall (now demolished) in Worcester, Massachusetts, "to consider the Rights, Duties, and Relations of Women." Organized primarily by Paulina Wright Davis with Lucy Stone and others, the Worcester convention continued to emphasize woman suffrage, and a letter from Elizabeth Cady Stanton headed its list of correspondents. Central and western New Yorkers were active in this convention, including Quaker J.C. Hathaway, from Farmington, who served as secretary and president pro tem; Quaker Pliny Sexton, from Palmyra; and Samuel J. May, Unitarian minister from Syracuse. Activist Quakers, all affiliated with Congregational Friends, played prominent roles, including Hathaway, Hannah Darlington of Pennsylvania, and Mary Anne Johnson of Ohio. People who had attended the Seneca Falls convention included Lucretia Mott, Eliab W. Capron, and Frederick Douglass. For the first time, well-known Massachusetts abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Abby Kelley Foster, and Harriot K. Hunt participated in a woman's rights convention, along with Polish woman's rights activist Ernestine L. Rose; African American orator Sojourner Truth; C.C. Burleigh, editor of the *Pennsylvania Freeman*; Unitarians William Henry Channing and Samuel J. May, from Rochester and Syracuse, respectively; and Antoinette Brown, from South Butler, New York, first woman ordained as a Congregational minister.

Notably, organizers made no mention of color in the call to the convention (as had those at the Salem convention), and unlike earlier conventions, delegates at Worcester carefully distanced themselves from what they perceived to be the anti-male stance of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments.

Men and Women, in their reciprocities of love and duty are one flesh and one blood—mother, wife, sister, and daughter come so near the heart and mind of every man that they must be either his blessing or his bane. Where there is such mutuality of interests, such an interlinking of life, there can be no real antagonism of position and action. The sexes should not, for any reason or by any chance, take hostile attitudes towards each other, . . . but they should harmonize in opinion and co-operate in effort, for the reason that they must unite in the ultimate achievement of the desired reformation.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ *Proceedings of the Ohio Women's Convention*, 18–19.

In terms of themes, the convention emphasized education, "industrial avocations," civil and political rights, and social relations. It also included a specific resolution for suffrage:

Resolved, That women are clearly entitled to the right of suffrage, and to be considered eligible to office; . . . every party which claims to represent the humanity, civilization, and progress of the age, is bound to inscribe on its banners, Equality before the law, without distinction of sex or color.¹⁸⁹

Notably, the Worcester convention set up the structure that characterized the woman's rights movement until the Civil War. They appointed a central committee, along with specific committees to deal with education, industrial avocations, civil and political rights and regulations, and social relations, "who shall correspond with each other and with the Central Committee, hold meetings in their respective neighborhoods, gather statistics, facts, and illustrations, raise funds for purposes of publication; and through the press, tracts, books, and the living agent, guide public opinion upward and onward in the grand social reform of establishing woman's co-sovereignty with man." This central committee was authorized "to call other Conventions, at such times and places as they shall see fit," and to hold office until the next annual convention.¹⁹⁰

In England, Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill read a report of the Worcester meeting in the European version of the *New York Tribune*. Taylor was impressed. She responded with an influential essay published the following July in the *Westminster Review*, "The Enfranchisement of Women." Although unaware of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments, she echoed its argument:

That women have as good a claim as men have, in point of personal right, to the suffrage, or to a place in the jury-box, it would be difficult for any one to deny. It cannot certainly be denied by the United States of America, as a people or as a community. Their democratic institutions rest avowedly on the inherent right of every one to a voice in the government. Their Declaration of Independence . . . commences with this express statement:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

The contradiction between principle and practice cannot be explained away.¹⁹¹

On May 28–29, 1851, in the Akron, Ohio, Stone Church (Universalist, now demolished), women held their second annual woman's rights convention "to consider the

¹⁸⁸ *The Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Worcester, October, 23d & 24th, 1850* (Boston: Prentiss & Sawyer, 1851), 3–4.

¹⁸⁹ *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Worcester, October, 23d & 24th, 1850*, 15.

¹⁹⁰ *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Worcester, October, 23d & 24th, 1850*, 16.

¹⁹¹ Harriet Taylor Mill, excerpt from "Enfranchisement of Women," *Westminster Review* (July 1851): 295–96. Reprinted in Ann P. Robson and John M. Robson, eds., *Sexual Equality: Writings by John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor Mill, and Helen Taylor* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 178–82, <http://www.binghamton.edu/womhist/awrm/doc15.htm>. Women's rights advocates published Taylor's article two years later as one of a series of sixteen woman's rights tracts. Harriet Taylor, "Enfranchisement of Women," *Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review*, July 1851, reprinted in *Woman's Rights Tracts*, . . . No. 4 (Syracuse, 1853).

Rights, Duties and Relations of Women,” with Francis Dana Gage as president. Mary Anne Johnson played an active role, and editor Jane Gray Swisshelm attended for the first time. This convention paid special attention to the law, education, and working women. Maria L. Giddings gave a report on the common law, Mrs. K. Robinson gave a report on education, and Betsey Cowles reported on labor and its compensations. Several resolutions dealt specifically with women’s work, including an early proposal for unions (which they called “Labor Partnerships”).¹⁹²

Stanton’s letter picked up on three main themes: Women could petition for their legal rights, begin to work in a wide variety of fields (“and make ourselves, if not rich and famous, at least independent and respectable”), and work to educate children. “Begin with girls of this day, and in twenty years we can revolutionize this nation.”¹⁹³

This convention is now famous for Sojourner Truth’s speech, known to us today as her “Ar’n’t I a Woman?” speech. The minutes of the convention, however, noted only that “remarks upon the subject of Education were made by Mrs. Coe, Sojourner Truth, Rev. George Schlosser and Miss Sarah Coates.”¹⁹⁴

In 1851, Paulina Wright Davis presided over the second national convention held in Brinley Hall in Worcester. Lucretia Mott, Samuel J. May, and Antoinette Brown were among the vice presidents. Again, Elizabeth Cady Stanton sent a letter of support, along with a series of resolutions written with Emma Coe, chair of the business committee. Just as at Seneca Falls, the Declaration of Independence echoed through the debate. Resolutions, submitted by Wendell Phillips for the business committee, began with a reference to the Declaration of Independence, perhaps inspired by the *Westminster Review* article the previous July:

1. *Whereas*, according to the Declaration of Independence of the United States, all men are created equal and endowed with inalienable Rights to Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness; therefore,
Resolved, That we protest against the injustice done to Woman, by depriving her of that Liberty and Equality which alone can promote Happiness, as contrary alike to the Principles of Humanity and the Declaration of Independence.

References to taxation without representation led to the principal argument that woman suffrage was the “corner-stone of this enterprise, since we do not seek to protect woman, but rather to place her in a position to protect herself.”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² *The Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Akron, Ohio, May 28 and 29, 1851*, by the Woman's Rights Convention, Akron, OH, (Cincinnati, Ohio: Ben Franklin, 1851) 33–35, 9–10, 14–15.

¹⁹³ *The Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Akron, Ohio, May 28 and 29, 1851*, 33–35.

¹⁹⁴ As both Carleton Mabree and Nell Irvin Painter have convincingly argued, Truth’s speech, while powerful, probably never included this phrase. “Ar’n’t I a Woman?” was almost certainly an artifact of feminist, abolitionist, and poet Frances Dana Gage, who described Truth’s speech in detail in 1863. In 1851, the most detailed account was written by Truth’s friend Marius Robinson in the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*. While similar to Gage’s in many respects, it made no mention of “Ar’n’t I a Woman?” *The Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Akron, Ohio, May 28 and 29, 1851*, 7; Carleton Mabree, with Susan Mabree Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 67–82; Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996).

¹⁹⁵ *The Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Worcester, October 15th and 16th, 1851*, by the Woman's Rights Convention, Worcester, Massachusetts, 1851 (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1852), 11–12.

Letters from Harriet Martineau in England and Jeanne Deroine Pauline Roland, from prison in Paris, highlighted the increasing visibility of the U.S. woman's movement in Europe.¹⁹⁶

In 1852, Congregational Friends in Pennsylvania organized the first statewide woman's rights meeting in Pennsylvania, held in Horticultural Hall (still standing) in West Chester, June 2–3. James and Lucretia Mott and Mary Ann M'Clintock Truman, who had attended the Seneca Falls convention, attended.

In the president's address, Mariana Johnson (probably Mary Ann Johnson) alluded to the importance of the first convention at Seneca Falls:

In the summer of 1848, in the village of Seneca Falls, a small number of women, disregarding alike the sneers of the ignorant and the frowns of the learned, assembled in Convention and boldly claimed for themselves, and for their sex, the rights conferred by God and so long withheld by man. Their courageous words were the expression of sentiments which others had felt as deeply as themselves, but which the restraints imposed by long-established custom had taught them to suppress. But now the hour had come, and the world stood prepared for the reception of a new thought, which is destined to work a revolution in human society, more beneficent than any that has preceded it. The seeds of truth which that Convention planted in faith and hope were not left to perish. In many thoughtful minds they germinated apace and brought forth fruit. That fruit was seen in the large Convention held in Ohio in the spring of 1850, in that held in Massachusetts in the autumn of the same year, and in those which have followed since in New England and the West.¹⁹⁷

The third national convention met in Syracuse, New York, on September 8–10, 1852. The convention opened with a brief historical overview, identifying Seneca Falls and Rochester as the first woman's rights conventions:

The first Conventions on the subject were held at Seneca Falls, and Rochester, N. Y., in the summer of 1848. They based their claims on the Declaration of Independence: demanded equal rights; published their sentiments over their own names; at the head of the list stood the name of Lucretia Mott. A similar Convention was held at Salem, Ohio, in May, 1850, an able report of which was published, and widely circulated.

The first National Convention was held at Worcester, Mass., Oct. 1850.¹⁹⁸

Lucretia Mott presided. The convention elected her unanimously, except for one dissenting voice, that of her husband. People who had attended the Seneca Falls convention were well represented at Syracuse. Five of them spoke (Stanton, Martha Wright, Elizabeth M'Clintock Phillips, Catharine Fish Stebbins, and Amy Post), and four more attended (Thomas and Mary Ann M'Clintock, Mary Hallowell, and Sarah Hallowell). All were affiliated with Congregational Friends. Upstate New Yorkers at Syracuse included Rev. Antoinette Brown; Gerrit Smith; Griffith M. Cooper (Quaker abolitionist and Indian rights advocate from Williamson); Pliny Sexton (Quaker abolitionist from Palmyra); and Rev. Samuel J. May, Rosa Smith, Joseph Savage, and Lydia P. Savage, all from Syracuse.¹⁹⁹

New names also appeared as woman's rights supporters. Susan B. Anthony,

¹⁹⁶ *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Worcester, October, 13–16, 32–35.*

¹⁹⁷ Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:351–52.

¹⁹⁸ *The Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Syracuse, September 8th, 9th and 10th, 1852* (Syracuse, New York: J.E. Masters, 1852), iii, 6, 30–35.

¹⁹⁹ Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 1.

temperance and abolitionist lecturer, was a convert who had never been to a woman's rights convention before. Lydia A. Jenkins, a Unitarian from Auburn and Waterloo, came, as did Mary Springstead, abolitionist from Cazenovia. Matilda Joslyn Gage from Fayetteville gave her first speech at this convention. She later became a major leader in the National Woman Suffrage Association, editor (with Stanton and Anthony) of *History of Woman Suffrage*, editor of the *National Citizen and Ballot Box*, and author of *Woman, Church, and State*.

For the first time, the Liberty Party officially allied itself with a woman's rights convention. G.W. Jonson, chairman of the New York State central committee of the Liberty Party, sent \$10, with a toast: "WOMAN—Hers—equally with man—the inalienable Right to Education, Suffrage, Office, Property, Professions, Titles, and Honors—to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." But when C.A. Hammond proposed a resolution that, since the Liberty Party advocated woman suffrage, the convention should support it, delegates took no action.²⁰⁰

In her own letter, Stanton advocated tax resistance for women who owned property, since they could not vote, and equal education for men and women, a project she was promoting through the People's College. Horace Greeley, whose support as editor of the influential *New York Tribune* was of major importance to woman's rights advocates, sent a letter arguing that the problem of "bread" was at the heart of woman's rights. "Before all questions of Intellectual Training, or Political Franchises for Women—not to speak of such a trifle as costume—do I place the question of enlarged opportunities for work—of a more extended and diversified field of employment," he wrote.²⁰¹

Ernestine Rose introduced herself as a Polish Jewish woman. "an example of the universality of our claims; for not American women only, but a daughter of poor, crushed Poland, and the down-trodden and persecuted people called the Jews, 'a child of Israel,' pleads for the equal rights of her sex."²⁰²

One object of the Syracuse convention had been to create a more permanent woman's rights organization. The call to the convention, signed by Elizabeth C. Stanton, Paulina W. Davis, William H. Channing, Lucy Stone, and Samuel J. May noted that "the time has come, not only for the examination and discussion of Woman's social, civil and religious Rights, but also to form a thorough and efficient organization—a well-digested plan of operation, whereby these social rights, for which our fathers fought, bled and died, may be secured, and enjoyed by us."²⁰³

No permanent organization emerged, however. Influenced by Angelina Grimké and others, the convention rejected these plans, and conventions themselves became the dominant organizational structure of the woman's rights movement for the next twenty years. Grimké sent an impassioned letter opposing such an "artificial" organization, saying that "the tendency of Organization is to kill out the spirit which gave it birth, . . . organizations do not protect the sacredness of the individual," and "freedom of thought is not nurtured and strengthened by Organization." On the other hand, she wrote,

[S]uch an organization as now actually exists among the women of America I hail with heartfelt joy. We are bound together by the natural ties of a spiritual affinity; we are drawn to each other because we are attracted toward one common centre, the good of humanity. We

²⁰⁰ *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Syracuse, . . . 1852*, 8, 76.

²⁰¹ *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Syracuse*, 8–10.

²⁰² *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Syracuse*, 63.

²⁰³ *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Syracuse*, 8.

need no external bonds to bind us together, no cumbrous machinery to keep our minds and hearts in unity of purpose and effort. We are not the lifeless staves of a barrel, which can be held together only by the iron hoops of an Artificial Organization. All we need, and all we ask, is freedom to think our own thoughts, and act out the promptings of our own inner being.²⁰⁴

Ernestine Rose used an even more graphic simile. Organizations, she said, were like “Chinese bandages. . . . In political, moral, and religious bodies they [organizations] hindered the growth of men.”²⁰⁵

Lucy Stone sympathized with those who criticized organizations. “Like a burnt child that dreads the fire, they had all been in permanent organizations, and thus dreaded them. She had enough of thumb screws, and . . . soul screws, ever to wish to be placed under them again.” She thought organizations of some kind were necessary, but the woman’s rights movement was not ready for them. All they could do now, was “to agitate the public mind.”²⁰⁶

Adopting a resolution suggested by Paulina Wright Davis, the convention recommended instead that states and counties call regular woman’s rights meetings, “and thus co-operate with all throughout this nation, and the world, for the elevation of woman to her proper place in the mental, moral, social, religious and political world.” The system of using a central coordinating committee survived as the main organizing force for the woman’s rights movement until the Civil War, but no permanent woman’s rights organization emerged until 1869.²⁰⁷

In 1853, temperance reformers held two conventions in New York City. The first met at Metropolitan Hall. Billed as the World’s Temperance Convention, it excluded women, including the respected speaker Antoinette Brown. Reformers dubbed it the “Half-World’s Temperance Convention,” and woman’s rights activists held their own meeting down the street at the Broadway Tabernacle. “The Half world’s Convention was,” noted historian Elizabeth Cazden, “a watershed in women’s battle for a public voice. . . . In the aftermath of the convention, it was generally conceded that women, even when they took on ‘men’s’ roles, were entitled to be treated with decency and respect.”²⁰⁸

In 1853, the official national woman’s rights convention met at Cleveland, Ohio. Frances Dana Gage chaired the meeting, with Lucretia Mott, Amy Post, and Martha Wright as officers and James Mott on the business committee. Just as at Syracuse the year before, the convention opened with a brief history of the movement. Frances Dana Gage recounted the history of woman’s rights conventions, beginning with Seneca Falls:

I think the first Woman’s Rights Convention ever called in the United States, was called by a band of earnest men and women, at Seneca Falls, N.Y., in the fall [sic] of 1848. They met, held a two days session, and passed resolutions which were printed in the New York Tribune, and other papers, and created considerable sensation throughout the country. But very little was said, however, in favor of the movement, anywhere. Almost every one who spoke of it, characterized it as work of a set of ultra fanatics.

²⁰⁴ *Proceedings of the Woman’s Rights Convention, Held at Syracuse*, 80–81.

²⁰⁵ Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:541.

²⁰⁶ *Proceedings of the Woman’s Rights Convention, Held at Syracuse*, . . . 1852, 87.

²⁰⁷ *Proceedings of the Woman’s Rights Convention, Held at Syracuse*, . . . 1852, 86.

²⁰⁸ Cazden, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell*, 78–82.

Gage went on to list succeeding conventions, in Rochester, New York; Salem, Ohio; Worcester, Massachusetts; Akron, Ohio; Worcester, Massachusetts; Indiana; Massillon, Ohio; West Chester, Pennsylvania; and Syracuse, New York. "Perhaps no movement of such vital importance, warring so greatly against the old established prejudices of society, has ever been proposed to any people; and none, perhaps, has made such rapid strides in the favor of the people, as this movement for Woman's Rights. It is talked of everywhere," she noted.²⁰⁹

Highlighting the importance of Seneca Falls, Lucretia Mott suggested that the national convention in Cleveland adopt the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments as "a fitting honor to her who initiated these movements in behalf of woman in our country, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, of Seneca Falls." Ernestine Rose strongly supported this idea: "I second it as no less great, noble, and important, than the first honorable declaration of Independence; those great immutable truths which . . . have given to man hope, and life, and light. Yes, this declaration of woman's independence, is even more far-sighted and sublime." Some thought, however, that the Seneca Falls declaration, was simply a parody of the Declaration of Independence and would not be taken seriously. Others were reluctant to accuse individual men of intentionally doing wrong to women.²¹⁰

Although he thought the Cleveland convention should prepare an original document, William Lloyd Garrison liked the Seneca Falls declaration:

on listening to it, my mind was deeply impressed with its pertinency and its power. It seemed to me, the *argumentum ad hominum*, to this nation. It was measuring the people of this country by their own standard. It was taking their own words and applying their own principles to women, as they have been applied to men.²¹¹

And as for individual men not being guilty of wrongdoing toward women, Garrison would have none of it. "I believe in sin, therefore in a sinner; in theft, therefore in a thief; in slavery, therefore in a slave-holder; in wrong, therefore in a wrong doer," he said.

To say all this has been done without thinking, without calculation, without design, by mere accident, by a want of light; can any body believe this, who is familiar with all the facts in the case? . . . Never can it be said, that the victims are as much to be blamed as the victimizer; that the slaves are to be as much blamed as the slave-holders and slave-drivers. That the women who have no rights, are to be as much blamed as the men who have played the part of robbers and tyrants, and placed woman under their feet. We must deal with conscience. The men of this nation, and the men of all nations, have no just respect for woman.²¹²

In a letter to the convention, William Ellery Channing, liberal minister, suggested writing a new declaration. A committee did prepare such a declaration, and delegates sent all three declarations to the central committee for final action. Apparently, the committee adopted none of them.²¹³

²⁰⁹ *Proceedings of the National Women's Rights Convention, Held at Cleveland, Ohio, on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, October 5th, 6th, and 7th, 1853* (Cleveland, Ohio: Gray, Beardsley, Spear and Co., 1854), 4-5.

²¹⁰ *Proceedings of the National Women's Rights Convention, Held at Cleveland, Ohio . . . 1853*, 70-76.

²¹¹ *Proceedings of the National Women's Rights Convention, Held at Cleveland, Ohio . . . 1853*, 86-87.

²¹² *Proceedings of the National Women's Rights Convention, Held at Cleveland, Ohio . . . 1853*, 87-88.

In 1854, the convention met at Sansom Street Hall (built 1848, probably demolished) in Philadelphia on October 18–20, with Ernestine Rose as president. As so often before and after, people who had been at the first woman's rights convention in Seneca Falls played prominent roles. Lucretia Mott and Martha Wright served as officers, James Mott was on the finance committee, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton was appointed as part of a committee to publish tracts and articles.

In 1855, Martha Wright presided over the sixth annual convention, held in Nixon's Hall in Cincinnati, Ohio, with Lucretia and James Mott among the officers. In her opening address, Wright explicitly compared the strength of the woman's rights movement with its position in 1848, when women called the Seneca Falls convention "in timidity and doubt of our own strength, our own capacity, our own powers." Reflecting the call to the Seneca Falls convention, the Cincinnati convention reaffirmed the aim of the woman's rights movement as "equality with man in social, civil, and political rights." One of the resolutions at Cincinnati echoed the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments:

WHEREAS, All men are created equal and endowed with certain inalienable rights, and that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; and WHEREAS, To secure these rights governments are instituted . . . deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; therefore Resolved, That the legislators of these United States are self-convicted of the grossest injustice and . . . inconsistency with their own admitted principles, while they refuse these rights to women.²¹⁴

At Cincinnati, Lucy Stone gave one of her most famous addresses. To critics who called woman's rights reformers "a few disappointed women," she responded in hearty agreement: "From the first years to which my memory stretches, I have been a disappointed woman. In education, in marriage, in religion, in everything, disappointment is the lot of woman. It shall be the business of my life to deepen this disappointment in every woman's heart until she bows down to it no longer."²¹⁵

In 1856, Lucy Stone presided over the seventh national convention at Broadway Tabernacle (demolished) in New York City. Lucretia and James Mott were officers, and Martha Wright was secretary. As had become customary, Stone opened the convention with a brief historical overview. Her mood was upbeat, as nine northern and midwestern states had already passed women's property laws. Perhaps in reaction to the emphasis on Seneca Falls in earlier years, Stone emphasized the importance of 1850 as the first national convention. She introduced the 1856 convention as the "Seventh Annual National Woman's Rights Convention" and noted,

[O]ur first effort was made in a small room in Boston, where a few women were gathered, who had learned woman's rights by woman's wrongs. There had been only one meeting in Ohio, and one in New York. The laws were yet against us, custom was against us, prejudice was against us, and more than all, women were against us. . . . Never before has any reformatory movement gained so much in so short a time. Looking over the past seven years, it seems almost a miracle that so much has been wrought, which is traceable directly to our efforts.²¹⁶

²¹³ *Proceedings of the National Women's Rights Convention, Held at Cleveland, Ohio, 188.*

²¹⁴ Women's Rights National Historical Park Web site, <http://www.nps.gov/archive/wori/wrnhp.htm>.

²¹⁵ Women's Rights National Historical Park Web site; Million, *Woman's Voice, Woman's Place*.

²¹⁶ *The Proceedings of the Seventh National Woman's Rights Convention Held in New York City, at the Broadway Tabernacle On Tuesday and Wednesday, November 25th and 26th, 1856* (Austin, Texas:

No convention was held in 1857. Lucy Stone, who had been most active in organizing earlier conventions, was pregnant. The economic depression of 1857 interfered with plans for a woman's rights convention in Cleveland. Susan B. Anthony was unable to find help to organize the usual fall meeting, so Stone and Anthony reluctantly agreed to postpone a gathering until spring 1858 and to hold it in conjunction with the May meetings of abolitionist conventions in New York City.

Anthony presided over the eighth national convention in 1858, held at Mozart Hall in New York City, with Martha Wright as secretary. Anthony opened the meeting with a reference to the Declaration of Independence and the "great self-evident truth—that all men are created with inalienable rights." For the first time, the woman's rights convention met as part of the series of reform conventions held each year in May in New York City. The woman's rights convention followed the American Anti-Slavery Society meeting, and Anthony contrasted the two conventions, one "whose object has been to show that the color of the skin made no difference to that principle," and one "to tell people that sex does not rob human beings of their inalienable rights."²¹⁷

Anthony then read "a brief history of the Woman's Rights movement, from the pen of Mrs. Elisabeth [sic] Cady Stanton." According to Stanton,

We may date the Woman's Rights movement in this country, to the division in the Anti-Slavery ranks in 1840. Though, before that time, Frances Wright, an English woman, and Ernestine L. Rose, a native of Poland, had spoken nobly on the Equality of the Sexes, and claimed for woman, at that early day, all that we now demand. In the formation of the first Anti-Slavery Society, man and woman labored unitedly, with earnestness & zeal, as has ever been the case in every moral movement. But in this, she did more than sew pin-cushions and ask alms; she proclaimed the living truths of the Gospel of freedom with her own voice, in the Halls of Legislation, as well as at the hearth-stone.

Stanton discussed the antislavery movement in the 1830s and the World Anti-Slavery convention in 1840. She reviewed woman's rights in England and France. Then she noted that "in our own country, in 1848, a large body of men and women responded to a Call for a Woman's Rights Convention,—the first of the kind ever held." Ann Gordon has suggested that this essay formed the basis for her later historical review of the early woman's rights movement in *History of Woman Suffrage*.²¹⁸

Stanton had, however, been thinking about such a history since at least 1848, when

Jenkins Publishing Co., 1856), 4. Later in the convention, Ernestine Rose also referred to the Worcester convention as "the first convention": "Compare the first convention, held seven years ago, with this. Compare public opinion at that time with public opinion now. The difference was so striking, that it seemed to her that no other reform ever agitated had gained so much ground in so short a time as the Woman's Rights movement; and rightly and justly so, for this was not merely a Woman's Rights movement, but a human rights movement; there was no claim set forth by woman that did not embrace the rights of man as well." (p. 13). Stanton's letter, although printed in the minutes, 88–90, did not reach the convention until after the meeting had closed. She focused attention on marriage as an institution "opposed to all God's laws . . . by no means an equal partnership." "*The woman*," she argued, "is greater than the wife or the mother; and in consenting to take upon herself these relations, she should never sacrifice one iota of her individuality to any senseless conventionalism, or false codes of feminine delicacy and refinement."

²¹⁷ "Woman's Rights Convention," in the *New York Daily Tribune* (May 14, 1858).

²¹⁸ "Address by Elizabeth Cady Stanton to the Eighth National Woman's Rights Convention," *Selected Papers*, 1:361–372.

Mott advised her that “you can borrow from S.M. Grimké’s all the historical part of hers—Bible & all—and from Mary Woolstonecraft [*sic*] much that is excellent.” In 1855, Mott gave her more detailed suggestions about Quaker women, the World Anti-Slavery convention, and the abolitionist movement:

Let me suggest then, that the opening Chapter go farther back than the “A.S. [Anti-Slavery] split in 1840”—Sarah & Angelina Grimké’s labors in Mass. in 1835 & 6 aroused the Clergy. . . . From the time of the 1st. convention of women—in New Y[ork] 1837—the battle began. A resolution was there warmly discussed & at length adopted by a majority—many members dissenting, “that it was time that woman should move in the sphere Providence assigned her, & no longer rest satisfied in the limits which corrupt custom & a perverted application of the Scriptures had placed her, &c.”—During that year Sarah Grimké’s Letters were written On the Equality of the Sexes —the best Work after Mary Woolstonecraft’s [*sic*] Rights of Woman.²¹⁹

In 1859, Lucretia Mott, “one of the pioneers of the Woman’s Rights Cause,” presided over the ninth convention, again held in Mozart Hall, with an appeal signed by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Martha Wright, and seven others to be sent to state legislatures guaranteeing women the right to a trial by a jury of female peers, the right to vote (if taxed), the right to keep her own wages, and the “right to person, property, children, and home.” So hopeful was Mott about the progress of the movement that, she thought,

the indications of the times were, that they had only to ask for their enfranchisement, to have the request granted. The gradual intellectual advancement of woman was evident in the literature of the country. Spheres of usefulness have opened to her, which she is filling with honor to herself; and the prediction of Catharine Beecher, thirty years ago, that woman would enlarge her usefulness, was being realized in medicine, science, art and industry. She had found that the hill of science was not, after all, so steep as it had been represented, but that it was accessible to her. Woman had overstepped the narrow limits that had been assigned to her by a corrupt civilization, and a perverted interpretation of the Scriptures. She had learned her own responsibilities, and to obey a higher law than that laid down for her. The moral sense of the people was becoming more elevated, and thus woman was becoming free.²²⁰

In May 1860, Martha Wright presided over the tenth national woman’s rights convention at Cooper Union (still standing) in New York City. Anthony opened the convention with a review of accomplishments, both nationally and in New York State, “the results of twenty years of agitation,” implying that 1840 was the beginning of the movement for woman’s rights. She went on, however, to list the names of “the heroic enunciators of the great idea of woman’s equality,” many of whom were active before 1840: Mary Wollstonecraft, Frances Wright, Ernestine L. Rose, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady

²¹⁹ Lucretia Mott to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, October 3, 1848, in Gordon, ed., *Selected Papers*, 1:126–130; Lucretia Mott to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, March 16, 1855, Beverly Wilson Palmer, ed. *Selected Letters of Lucretia Coffin Mott* (Urbana and Chicago, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2002). As historian Vivien Rose has pointed out, the phrase “corrupt custom [s] and a perverted application of the Scriptures” appeared also in Mott’s speech at the 1859 woman’s rights convention (quoted below) and in one of the resolutions presented at the Seneca Falls woman’s rights convention, suggesting that Mott was the author of that resolution.

²²⁰ *Proceedings of the National Woman’s Rights Convention, Held in New York City, Thursday, May 12, 1859, With a Phonographic Report of the Speech of Wendell Phillips*, by J.M.W. Yerrinton (Rochester, New York: Steam Press of A. Strong and Co., 1859), 4–5.

Stanton. Responding to an article in the *New York Observer* (and perhaps hinting at other strains among movement leaders), Anthony noted that “it matters not to those who live for the race, and not for self alone, who has the praise. So they but get all they ask, and justice be done to woman in Church, in State, and at the fire-side an *equal* every where with man—they will not complain.”²²¹

Emerging from domestic isolation after the birth of her seventh (and last) child, Stanton began once more to take an active part in public meetings. She served on the business committee for this New York convention, and she also served on the executive committee of the central committee, one of five of the six members (including Martha Wright and Mary Hallowell, who had also attended the Seneca Falls convention) who came from central New York. Rev. Samuel J. May, Unitarian minister from Syracuse, and Susan B. Anthony, from Rochester, completed the group. Only Wendell Phillips represented the Boston contingent. Beset with her own domestic responsibilities, Lucy Stone declined to serve, the first time she had been absent from the central committee since its inception in 1850. Stone's biographer, Joelle Million, titled the chapter covering these years, “Passing the Mantle” and concluded that “Stone passed to Stanton not only the reins of the National Woman's Rights Convention but also her place at the public rostrum. Her own voice would, indeed, be hushed for several years.”²²²

On March 20, 1860, New York State passed a new law, giving women joint custody of their children as well as control over both wages and property. Stanton shared with the convention the same speech she had given to the Judiciary Committee of the New York State Assembly on March 19. This law, she said, was just the beginning. Women wanted further reforms: the ballot, the right of trial by a jury of women, “the control and custody of our persons in marriage.” Stanton presented a series of resolutions and a second address, on marriage, in which she introduced the question of divorce.²²³

In many ways, New York's 1860 legislation (repealed in 1862) was the high-water mark of the woman's movement for years. The Civil War interrupted the momentum of woman's rights conventions, as it did the development of the movement as a whole, and woman's rights advocates held no more national conventions until 1866. In 1863, Stanton, who had moved to New York City from Seneca Falls the year before, and Anthony, on behalf of the woman's central committee, turned their energies toward creating a Woman's National Loyal League. The League held a national convention at the Church of the Puritans (demolished) on Union Square in New York City on May 14, 1863. Martha Wright and Amy Post joined such stalwarts as Lucy Stone, Ernestine Rose, and Angelina Grimké Weld as leaders of this movement, sending a petition with four hundred thousand names asking Congress to end slavery, a petition that helped promote passage of the Thirteenth Amendment. Anthony's address to the convention quoted once more the Declaration of Independence: “Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.” This is the fundamental principle of democracy.” This central truth would sustain the organized woman's movement in its transition after the Civil War to a specific emphasis on woman suffrage.

²²¹ *Proceedings of the Tenth National Woman's Rights Convention, Held at the Cooper Institute, New York City, May 10th and 11th, 1860* (Boston: Yerrinton & Garrison, 1860), 6–7.

²²² *Proceedings of the Tenth National Woman's Rights Convention*, , 8–9; Million, *Woman's Voice, Woman's Place*, 263–65.

²²³ *Proceedings of the Tenth National Woman's Rights Convention*, 34–46, 65–73.

Transforming the Movement: Post-Civil War

For a brief period in the late 1860s, spurred on by leaders such as Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and Susan B. Anthony, a core cohort from Seneca Falls, including Mott, Stanton, and Wright, joined other abolitionists and woman's rights advocates to transform the ideal that "all men and women are created equal" into an organized movement for suffrage for all people, of whatever race or gender.

The transformation began in 1866, at the eleventh and last national woman's rights convention, held at the Church of the Puritans New York City. The meeting included speeches by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, president of the convention, as well as Theodore Tilton, editor of the *Independent*; Henry Ward Beecher, minister of Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, New York, perhaps the best-known clergyman in the country; and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, an Ohio African American who related her experiences as a destitute widow with four children. All but Stanton were newcomers to the woman's rights stage.

This convention explicitly linked woman's rights and African American rights as equal issues. It also marked a new emphasis on national as opposed to state action. Like activists before the Civil War, however, these women and men continued to emphasize the importance both of Seneca Falls as the first woman's rights convention and Worcester as the first national convention.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's speech set the tone, as she frankly challenged her mostly white audience to incorporate issues not only of sex but also of race and class:

This grand and glorious revolution which has commenced will fail to reach its climax of success, until throughout the length and breadth of the American Republic, the nation shall be so color-blind, as to know no man by the color of his skin or the curl of his hair. It will then have no privileged class, trampling upon and outraging the unprivileged classes, but will be then one great privileged nation, whose privilege will be to produce the loftiest manhood and womanhood that humanity can attain. I do not believe that giving the woman the ballot is immediately going to cure all the ills of life. I do not believe that white women are dewdrops just exhaled from the skies. . . . You white women speak here of rights. I speak of wrongs. I, as a colored woman, have had in this country an education which has made me feel as if I were in the situation of Ishmael, my hand against every man, and every man's hand against me. . . . I tell you that if there is any class of people who need to be lifted out of their airy nothings and selfishness, it is the white women of America.²²⁴

Harper went on to speak of discrimination on public transportation, both toward herself and toward Harriet Tubman, the Moses of her people.

Harper's discussion provided the context for Susan B. Anthony's introduction of the convention's main resolution, "That the time has come for an organization that shall demand UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE, and that hereafter we shall be known as the "AMERICAN EQUAL RIGHTS ASSOCIATION." Anthony noted,

For twenty years, the Woman's Rights movement has pressed the claims of woman to the right of representation in the government. The first National Woman's Rights Convention was held in Worcester, Mass., in 1850, and each successive, year conventions were held in different cities of the Free States—Worcester, Syracuse, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and New York—until the rebellion. Since then, till now, we have held no conventions.

²²⁴ *Proceedings of the Eleventh National Woman's Rights Convention, Held at the Church of the Puritans, New York, May 10, 1866* (New York: Robert J. Johnston, 1866), 46–48.

Up to this hour, we have looked to State action only for the recognition of our rights; but now, by the results of the war, the whole question of suffrage reverts back to Congress and the Constitution. . . . taxation must give representation; hence our demand must now go beyond woman—it must extend to the farthest bound of the principle of the “consent of the governed,” the only authorized or just government. We, therefore, wish to broaden our Woman’s Rights platform, and make it in *name*—what it ever has been in *spirit*—a Human Rights platform.²²⁵

Mott related this resolution directly to Seneca Falls. “It is now more than twenty years since this Woman’s Rights movement began in this country,” she said, “comparing such an audience as this with the handful who met with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in the first Convention, in a little Wesleyan church at Seneca Falls.” She ended with an appeal to the young women of America “to make yourselves acquainted with the history of the Woman’s Rights movement, from the days of Mary Wollstoncraft [*sic*].”²²⁶

In 1867, New York State held a new state constitutional convention, and suffragists saw an opportunity to create a model for a proposed equal suffrage amendment to the U.S. Constitution. George William Curtis offered an amendment to the state constitution in 1867, to “strike out the word ‘male,’ and wherever in that section the word ‘he’ occurs, add ‘or she,’ and wherever the word ‘his’ occurs add ‘or her.’” Curtis noted,

From the formal opening of the general discussion of the question in this country, by the Convention at Seneca Falls, in 1848, down to the present moment, the opposition to the suggestion . . . has been only the repetition of a traditional prejudice, or the protest of mere sentimentality, and to cope with these is like wrestling with a malaria or arguing with the east wind. . . . The absolute exclusion of women from political power in this State is simply usurpation.²²⁷

Anthony sent a letter to the New York State Colored Men’s Association, urging African American men “to extend your demand for the ballot to your wives and daughters—your mothers and sisters,” whose grievances “are a thousand fold greater than those of colored men.” In spite of support by President Jermain Loguen, the convention tabled her appeal by fifty-two out of fifty-four votes. Curtis’ arguments in the constitutional convention fared no better, and the convention never came close to passing woman suffrage. Nor did it support equal suffrage for African American men. African American men did not vote on an equal basis with European American men in New York State until passage of the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1870.²²⁸

Stanton, Anthony, Stone, Henry Blackwell, and Rev. Olympia Brown traveled through Kansas in 1867 on behalf of both African American suffrage and woman suffrage in the proposed new Kansas state constitution. They convinced only a third of the voters to support both propositions.

²²⁵ *Proceedings of the Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention, Held at the Church of the Puritans, New York, May 10, 1866*, 48.

²²⁶ *Proceedings of the Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention, Held at the Church of the Puritans, New York, May 10, 1866*, 49–51.

²²⁷ *Proceedings and Debates of the Constitutional Convention of the State of New York* (Albany, New York: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1868), 364.

²²⁸ Susan B. Anthony to New York State Colored Men’s Convention, 1 October 1868, in Ann D. Gordon, ed., *Selected Letters*, 2:183–84.

Hundreds of women, both black and white, did not wait for constitutional amendments, however. Between 1868 and 1873, from Washington, D.C., through New England, New York, Ohio, and Michigan, they went to the polls in large numbers. Even though they knew their votes would not be counted, dozens of women, white and black, voted in Vineland, New Jersey, in 1868. Election officials received them courteously. The women had their photographs taken, and then they sent their ballots to the local historical society. In 1869 and 1870, they tried again, in larger numbers. This group was centered on the Friends of Human Progress. Organized by Margaret Pryor, a signer of the original Declaration of Sentiments at Seneca Falls, the group met at Plum Hall in Vineland and sustained woman's rights activism for many years. In Michigan, Catharine Stebbins, another signer, also tried to vote.²²⁹

In 1868, several authors contributed essays to a key volume called *Eminent Women of the Age: Being Narratives of the Lives and Deeds of the Most Prominent Women of the Present Generation*. Elizabeth Cady Stanton contributed an essay titled "The Woman's Rights Movement and Its Champions in the United States," in which she consolidated much of the work she had written over the past several years. Notably, while Stanton claimed that Seneca Falls was the first woman's rights convention, she made no claim that Seneca Falls was the origin of the whole woman's rights movement. Instead, she set Seneca Falls in a larger historical context, stating that "we may date the Woman's Rights cause proper, from the division in the anti-slavery organization in 1840." Even earlier, she noted, Frances Wright ("an Englishwoman of rare gifts both as a writer and speaker") had attracted large audiences in the U.S., "all that the champions of woman's rights now claim." Polish-born Ernestine L. Rose, a powerful orator and "a woman of great beauty, refinement, and cultivation" took up where Wright left off.²³⁰

Stanton's description of Seneca Falls in this 1868 account is worth quoting in its entirety, since she followed this outline in all subsequent writings:

While walking the streets of London, Mrs. Mott and I resolved on a Woman's Rights Convention, as soon as we returned to America. Accordingly, in the summer of 1848, while she was on a visit to her sister, Martha Wright, of Auburn, I proposed to her, to call a woman's rights convention, at Seneca Falls, where I then lived. She consented, and the call was immediately issued in the county papers, and we at once prepared resolutions, speeches, and a declaration of sentiments. After much consultation over the declaration, finding that our fathers had similar grievances to our own, and the same number, we decided to adopt the immortal declaration of '76 as our model. James Mott—one of nature's noblemen, both in character and appearance, the husband of Lucretia—presided at this first convention. Among those who took part in the discussions were Frederick Douglass, Thomas and Mary Ann McClintock [sic], and their two daughters, Ansel Bascom, Catharine Stebbins, Amy Post, and Martha Wright. It continued through two days, was well attended, and extensively reported. The declaration was published in nearly every paper in the country, and the nation was convulsed with laughter, from Maine to Louisiana, though our demands for suffrage, the right to property, work, and wages were the same that wise men accept to-day, the same that Henry Ward Beecher preaches in his pulpit, and John Stuart Mill presses on the consideration of the British Parliament. Martha Wright, the sister of Lucretia, took an active part in this convention, and has presided over nearly every convention that has been held in

²²⁹ Paulina Wright Davis, 23; Gordon, ed., *Selected Papers*, 2:625, 645–54; Hawkes, "Life of Elizabeth McClintock Phillips."

²³⁰ Elizabeth Cady Stanton in Theodore Tilton, ed., *Eminent Women of the Age: Being Narratives of the Lives and Deeds of the Most Prominent Women of the Present Generation* (Hartford, Connecticut: S.M. Betts, 1868), 362.

later days. . . . Our next convention was held in Rochester, a few weeks later.

Stanton credited Ohio women with organizing the first state woman's rights convention, and, as usual, gave credit to the first national meeting held in Brinley Hall in Worcester, Massachusetts, in October 1850, as "the first thoroughly organized, and ably sustained convention, for which extensive preparations were made."²³¹

Theodore Tilton, editor of the *Independent*, contributed an entry on Elizabeth Cady Stanton to *The Eminent Women of the Age*. In it, he highlighted the importance of both the Seneca Falls convention and Stanton's role in it:

The first "Woman's Rights Convention" (known to history by that name) was held July 19th and 20th, 1848, in the Wesleyan Chapel at Seneca Falls. Copies of the official report of the proceedings are now rare, and will one day be hunted for by antiquarians, . . . With a reverential interest I look back on this modest chronicle of a great event. That convention little thought it would be historic. But it was the first of a chain of similar conventions which, like the links round a Leyden jar, have since girdled half the world with the brightness of a new idea. The chief agent in calling the convention was Mrs. Stanton. It met in the town of her residence. Its resolution and declarations of sentiment were the offspring of her pen. Its one great leading idea—the elective franchise—was a suggestion of her brain. I do not know of any public demand for woman's suffrage, made by any organized convention previous to Mrs. Stanton's demand for it.²³²

The breakup of the American Equal Rights Association, the failure to secure woman suffrage in either New York State in 1867 or Kansas in 1869, and the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment split the woman suffrage movement. Two national organizations emerged, the National Woman Suffrage Association (formed on May 15, 1869, by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and other New Yorkers) and the American Woman Suffrage Association formed in the fall by Lucy Stone, Henry Blackwell, and other Boston based suffragists. (Henry Blackwell charged that he and Lucy Stone did not attend the founding meeting of the National Woman Suffrage Association because Stanton had told them at the meeting of the Equal Rights Association the day before that "all idea of forming a new society or taking any steps towards doing so were for the present abandoned.") The National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) opposed ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, granting the vote to African American men without including women. The AWSA supported ratification.²³³

On March 15, 1869, George W. Julian, Congressman from Indiana, submitted a Sixteenth Amendment to Congress, incorporating suffrage for all citizens of the United States "whether native or naturalized," "without any distinction or discrimination whatever founded on sex." The National Woman Suffrage Association jumped to its support. In January 1870, the group held a convention in Washington, D.C. Stanton, Anthony, and others spoke before the joint congressional committee on suffrage in the District of Columbia. Charles Sumner remarked that "in my twenty years' experience in the Senate of the United States, I have never witnessed so fine a hearing as this one, so large an attendance

²³¹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton. *Eminent Women of the Age*, 377–79, 388.

²³² Theodore Tilton in *Eminent Women of the Age*, 346.

²³³ Gordon, ed., *Selected Papers*, 2:242. For Stanton's view of the American Woman Suffrage Association, see "The Cleveland Convention," *Revolution*, October 28, 1869, reprinted in Gordon, ed., *Selected Papers*, 2:276–78.

and such respectful attention.” Paulina Wright Davis wrote, “THUS BEGINS THE NATIONAL HISTORY OF THIS GREAT REFORM—A FIT OPENING FOR 1870.”²³⁴

Rivalry between the two National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association dominated the national stage for the next twenty years. History became contested ground, as each group began to create its own version of the historical record.

²³⁴ Gordon, ed., *Selected Papers*, 2:236; Davis, *A History of the National Woman's Rights Movement for Twenty Years*, 23.

THE USES OF SENECA FALLS: CREATING A LEGEND, 1870–1920

In the context of the new rivalry between two national woman's rights organizations, the New York group held a "decade meeting" in Apollo Hall in New York City in 1870, featuring *A History of the National Woman's Rights Movement for Twenty Years*, written by Paulina Wright Davis. Davis, who spoke at the meeting, alluded to disputes within the movement, assuring her listeners, "I have set down nothing in malice," and "I have endeavored to keep this history free from sectionalism and faction, believing that the *finale* would bring together all parties in one glad day of rejoicing."²³⁵

Although reformers from 1850 to 1870 consistently highlighted Seneca Falls as the first woman's rights convention and Worcester as the first national woman's rights convention, Davis and Elizabeth Cady Stanton changed their story in 1870. For the first and only time in the history of the woman's rights movement, woman's rights advocates downplayed the Seneca Falls convention and highlighted the first national convention at Worcester in 1850 as the real beginning of the woman's rights movement. "The movement in England, as in America, may be dated from the first National Convention, held in Worcester, Mass., October, 1850," noted Stanton. This new emphasis on the importance of the Worcester convention seems to have been part of a deliberate attempt to placate the Massachusetts-based American Woman Suffrage Association, at a time when reconciliation with the New York-based National Woman Suffrage Association still appeared possible.²³⁶

The attempt to unify the movement in 1870 failed. From 1870 until 1890, two suffrage organizations dominated the national movement. After the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified in 1870, the National Woman Suffrage Association worked for a federal woman suffrage amendment. They took only women as official members, dealt with issues broader than suffrage (including working women's issues and divorce), published the *Revolution* for two years, and began the *History of Woman Suffrage* in the 1880s. In contrast, the American Woman Suffrage Association worked for suffrage on a state-by-state basis, admitted men as members, focused mainly on suffrage to the exclusion of other issues, and published the long-lived *Woman's Journal*, edited by Lucy Stone, Mary Livermore, and Julia Ward Howe.

After 1870, when the split between these two groups was clearly long-term, the story of Seneca Falls shifted back to the interpretation that had been standard since 1850: Seneca Falls was the first woman's rights convention and Worcester was the first national convention. Now, however, Stanton and Anthony, as leaders of the National Woman Suffrage Association, told the story in several different contexts. They began with a series of tracts, which included a reprint of the minutes of the Seneca Falls and Rochester

²³⁵ Davis, *A History of the National Woman's Rights Movement*, 28–31.

²³⁶ An article from the *New York Sun* in 1870 repeated this distinction: "Twenty-two years ago, in 1848, the first meeting for the inauguration of the woman's rights movement was called at Seneca Falls, by Mrs. Lucretia Mott and Mrs. E. Cady Stanton. This was a local meeting, and the first National Convention assembled at Worcester, 1850. The Convention at Worcester, of which yesterday was the second decade celebration, was the real national commencement of the suffrage movement." Davis, *History of the National Woman's Rights Movement*, 3–5; "Address by Elizabeth Cady Stanton to the Eighth National Woman's Rights Convention," in Gordon, ed., *Selected Papers*, 1:361–372; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Eminent Women of the Age* (Hartford, Connecticut: S.M. Betts, 1868), 362. Davis, *History of the National Woman's Rights Movement*, 3–5. Davis also had the intriguing suggestion that Sarah Tyndale of Philadelphia had promoted the idea of a convention about 1848: "Indeed the idea of such a convention had often been discussed in her home, more than two years before [1850]," noted Davis, 14.

conventions, as well as a speech purportedly given by Stanton at the Seneca Falls convention. If there ever was a “legend” of Seneca Falls as the origin of the woman’s rights movement, it began here.²³⁷

Beginning in 1873, the National Woman Suffrage Association began to celebrate anniversaries of the Seneca Falls convention as the birth of the suffrage movement. Mott called the 1873 meeting the “silver wedding” of the association, and Anthony noted that “even at that time [1848] the friends of the movement saw that the right to vote was one of the objects then sought to be obtained.” Matilda Joslyn Gage’s first resolutions at this meeting highlighted the importance of Seneca Falls as well as the impact of Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and others who organized the Seneca Falls convention:

Whereas, The demands first publicly promulgated in an obscure village in the State of New York have now spread over the world; therefore . . .

Resolved, That Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton will evermore be held in grateful remembrance as the pioneers in this grandest reform of the age; that as the wrongs they attacked were broader and deeper than any other, so as time passes they will be revered as foremost among the benefactors of the race, and that we also hold sacred the memory of their co-laborers in the Convention of 1848.²³⁸

The 1876 celebration of the nation’s centennial in Philadelphia brought questions of history once more to the fore. Women affiliated with the National Woman Suffrage Association, including Susan B. Anthony and Matilda Joslyn Gage, infiltrated the official ceremonies to present a “Declaration of the Rights of Women,” directed to “our daughters of 1976.” As part of their legacy, they began to write of a history of their own movement. Lucy Stone, president of the American Woman Suffrage Association, was invited to contribute a chapter, but she refused. Stone wrote to Stanton on August 3, 1876: “In regard to the History of the Woman’s Rights Movement, I do not think it can be written by anyone who is alive to-day. Your ‘wing’ surely are not competent to write the history of ‘our wing,’ nor should we be of yours.” No one realized, of course, that, far from being the work of a few short weeks, this project would become the start of the monumental three-volume *History of Woman Suffrage*, whose narrative shaped woman’s rights history into the twenty-first century. In spite of repeated efforts by Stanton and Anthony to incorporate Stone’s comments, Stone refused to participate.²³⁹

In 1878, growing older themselves (Lucretia Mott was eighty-six years old, Stanton was sixty-three, and Anthony was fifty-eight), National Woman Suffrage Association leaders celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the Seneca Falls convention. They held “a grand convention” at the First Unitarian Church in Rochester with Amy Post, Sarah Pugh, Catharine Fish Stebbins, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, and other stalwarts. The 1878 anniversary was in many ways a meeting of reconciliation, attracting some of those, such as Hannah Cutler, who had sided with the American Woman Suffrage Association. Wendell

²³⁷ *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Conventions at Seneca Falls and Rochester, N.Y., July and August, 1848* (New York: Robert J. Johnston, 1870). For more on this speech, see Gordon, ed., *Selected Papers*, 1:94-123.

²³⁸ “Woman Suffrage,” *New York Times*, May 7, 1873.

²³⁹ Lucy Stone to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, August 3, 1876, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Lucy Stone, July 31, 1878, in Ann D. Gordon, ed., *Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony: Vol. 3: National Protection for National Citizens, 1873-1880* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 249, 401.

Phillips, who had opposed Stanton and Anthony over the Fifteenth Amendment, wrote a letter of congratulations:

No reform has gathered more devoted and self-sacrificing friends. No one has had lives more generously given to its service. . . . You who remember the indifference which almost discouraged us in 1848, and who have so bravely faced ungenerous opposition and insult since, must look back on the result with unmixed astonishment and delight. . . . If I might presume to advise, I should say, "close up the ranks and write on our flag only one claim—the ballot." Everything helps us, and if we are united, success cannot long be delayed.²⁴⁰

Stanton's own speech was optimistic.

Thirty years have passed since many of us now present met in this same church to discuss the true position of woman as a citizen of a republic. . . . And thus the greatest movement of the century was inaugurated. I say greatest, because through the elevation of woman all humanity is lifted to a higher plane of action. To contrast our position thirty years ago, under the old common law of England, with that we occupy under the advanced legislation of to-day, is enough to assure us that we have passed the boundary line—from slavery to freedom. We already see the milestones of a new civilization on every highway.²⁴¹

While Stanton saw this meeting as a celebration of progress, for Lucretia Mott, the spiritual authority of the movement, it was a passing of the torch. After a moving farewell from Frederick Douglass, Mott took Douglass' arm, and, "with her bonnet swinging in her hand, she passed slowly down the aisle, amid the sobbing of the audience, speaking still the words of good cheer as she went away from our earthly sight forever."²⁴²

In 1880, Lucy Stone and suffragists associated with the American Woman Suffrage Association organized a thirtieth anniversary celebration of the first national woman's rights convention in Worcester, Massachusetts. Although Antoinette Brown Blackwell urged Stone to use this as an overture to the National Woman Suffrage Association. Stone refused.²⁴³

At the meeting, Harriet Hanson Robinson, one of the few Massachusetts members of the National Woman Suffrage Association, reviewed the movement's history. The following year, she published her well-balanced and solid *Massachusetts in the Woman Suffrage Movement: A General, Political, Legal, and Legislative History from 1774, to 1881*. Following earlier woman's rights advocates, Robinson emphasized Seneca Falls as the first woman's rights convention and Worcester as the first national convention:

The first Convention to discuss woman's rights and duties was planned by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, and was held at Seneca Falls, New York, on the 19th and 20th of July, 1848. The members of this Convention based the claims of woman on the Declaration

²⁴⁰ Gordon, ed., *Selected Papers*, 3:390-91.

²⁴¹ Gordon, ed., *Selected Papers*, 3:387.

²⁴² Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Theodore Stanton, July 28, 1878, Stanton Papers, Douglass; Phoebe W. Couzins, November 22, 1888, "Lucretia Mott, Reminiscences by Phoebe W. Couzins," clipping from the Howard M. Jenkins Papers, Mott Papers, Swarthmore.

²⁴³ Lisa Tetrault has argued that the Worcester meeting was organized by those associated with the National Woman Suffrage Association as a calculated attempt to take over territory generally claimed by the American Woman Suffrage Association (290 ff), but the meeting was actually organized by Lucy Stone. The following year, however, in May 1881, Harriet Hanson Robinson did bring the NWSA to Boston for its annual meeting, and in 1882, Robinson organized the NWSA of Massachusetts.

of Independence, demanded equal rights, and published their sentiments over their own names.

The second convention was held at Rochester, and the third in Salem, Ohio, in May, 1850. Then came the Worcester convention, the fourth convention but the first national convention.²⁴⁴

In 1881, Stanton, Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage published the first three volumes of *History of Woman Suffrage*, a monumental survey of the U.S. woman's rights movement. It would be hard to overestimate the impact of this *History* on subsequent research. Ellen DuBois suggested that "there is nothing in the annals of American reform quite like the *History of Woman Suffrage*, a prolonged deliberate effort on the part of activists to ensure their place in the historical record." Stanton, Anthony, and Gage used their own comments to fill in the gaps between a huge collection of primary material, "a lovely, long string of separate historical jewels," so that, no matter what perspective readers had on the movement, they could judge the issues for themselves.²⁴⁵

Although Stanton, Anthony, and Gage attempted to be inclusive, they—as primary authors and editors—told the multifaceted story from their own perspective. New York State received a major emphasis in this history as the site of extremely active early organizations, at both local and state levels. Anticipating criticism for writing the history of a movement that they themselves had led, with its particular emphasis on the importance of Seneca Falls and New York State, Stanton, Anthony, and Gage compared their work to writing an autobiography.

Those who fight the battle can best give what all readers like to know—the impelling motives to action; the struggle in the face of opposition; the vexation under ridicule; and the despair in success too long deferred. Moreover, there is an interest in history written from a subjective point of view, that may compensate the reader in this case for any seeming egotism or partiality he may discover. As an autobiography is more interesting than a sketch by another, so is history written by its actors, as in both cases we get nearer the soul of the subject.²⁴⁶

The authors made a major effort, however, to give credit (and tell the story) of other woman's rights leaders and organizations. Biographical sketches read like a "who's who" of woman's rights activists in the early nineteenth century. The authors were, as DuBois noted, "lavish in their appreciation of individual achievement," and Anthony "insisted on expensive steel-plate portraits of important women's rights figures, so that future generations would have counter-evidence to the charge that all strong-minded women were de-sexed."²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Robinson was the first to refer to extensively to woman's rights ideas from the late eighteenth century. Not only did she quote Mary Wollstonecraft, whose ideas were widely known, but she also referred to Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, and Hannah Mather Crocker (whose *Observations on the Rights of Woman* had been published in 1818). Robinson emphasized Frances Wright and the abolitionists, but she also noted the influence of the Transcendentalists (especially Margaret Fuller, who edited *The Dial*) and *The Lowell Offering*. Harriet Hanson Robinson, *Massachusetts in the Woman Suffrage Movement: A General, Political, Legal, and Legislative History from 1774, to 1881*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883).

²⁴⁵ Ellen Carol DuBois, "Making Women's History: Historian-Activists of Women's Rights, 1880–1940," in *Woman Suffrage & Women's Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 213.

²⁴⁶ Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:7–8.

²⁴⁷ DuBois, "Making Women's History," in *Woman Suffrage & Women's Rights*, 213.

Did they succeed in presenting a balanced history? Some have argued they did not. Although they mentioned Lucy Stone, for example, both Joelle Million and Lisa Tetrault argued that Stone's role was deliberately downplayed. Whether this was a reflection of Stone's own unwillingness to share information with rivals she mistrusted, or whether Stanton, Anthony, and Gage were unable or unwilling to give Stone her due remains a major point of debate, still unsettled in the historical literature.

Lucy Stone, key organizer of the American Woman Suffrage Association, was keenly interested in the history of the movement, but her writings (and those of her husband, Henry Blackwell) appeared primarily in the *Woman's Journal* and in private correspondence, never in one collected volume. Despite the efforts of her daughter, Alice Stone Blackwell, to record Stone's reminiscences, Lucy Stone, unlike Stanton, never wrote an autobiography. In one of Stone's last speeches, "The Progress of Fifty Years," given in 1893 at the World's Congress of Representative Women, Stone focused on the history of the woman's movement, but, even there, she said little of her own career.²⁴⁸

A few examples illustrate the problem: Stone's picture was notably absent from the pantheon of woman's rights activists. Stone herself was unwilling to send a photograph for *History of Woman Suffrage*. Although Anthony tried very hard to get a picture of Stone (and she was willing to pay for it personally), she was not successful. Amelia Bloomer, too, complained that she did not receive full credit for her work. Her carefully crafted narrative on temperance, she said, was all cut up. Stanton assured her that all the pieces were there; they had simply been distributed into different parts of the book.²⁴⁹

As Lisa Tetrault has argued, the *History of Woman Suffrage* was written in a particular time, with a particular political agenda. This "kaleidoscopic tour of women's rights activism," suggested Tetrault, "helped construct that campaign's future by defining (and limiting) its past." Tetrault suggested that we still remember the Reconstruction-era campaign much as Stanton, Anthony, and Gage depicted it—with Stanton and Anthony at its center—is a testament to the endurance of their vision. But this vision was a product of a particular historic moment, an ex post facto construction that has effectively hidden from view the complicated and sometimes unsavory process by which these women consolidated power over a campaign that was initially beyond their control or direction. Still guided largely by *History*, scholars have read the end of the story back into the beginning. Tetrault argued that Stanton, Anthony, and Gage downplayed differences among women, subsuming distinctions of race, class, and perspective to suggest that "this history is *the* history and promise of *all* women," that there is "a single, universal definition of womanhood," and that the vote was the ultimate goal of the woman's rights movement. As a corollary, the movement itself, as presented in the *History*, was inseparable from Stanton and Anthony's leadership.²⁵⁰

Seneca Falls played a key role in this universalizing argument. For researchers looking for details of the Seneca Falls convention, Stanton's account in the *History of Woman Suffrage* of the Seneca Falls meeting is frustratingly skimpy. In a narrative of more than three thousand pages, she described the Seneca Falls convention itself in only two and a half pages, with five more pages devoted to quoting the Declaration of Sentiments and Frederick Douglass' editorial. Lisa Tetrault argued, however, with considerable success, that Stanton and Anthony organized the whole *History of Woman Suffrage* "to make an extended argument for the 1848 Seneca Falls convention as the birthplace of a woman suffrage

²⁴⁸ Andrea Moore Kerr, *Lucy Stone: Speaking Out for Equality*, 233, 238–39.

²⁴⁹ Ann D. Gordon, e-mail message to the author, October 2006; Amelia Bloomer to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Papers of Amelia Bloomer, Seneca Falls Historical Society.

²⁵⁰ Tetrault, "Memory of a Movement," 2, 4.

movement.”²⁵¹

In 1888, with the fortieth anniversary celebration of Seneca Falls in Washington, D.C., the legend of Seneca Falls took secure root in American memory. The National Woman Suffrage Association held the International Council of Women in the nation's capital, reinforcing the idea that the worldwide movement for woman's rights owed its origins to Seneca Falls. In Seneca Falls itself, citizens read the call for the 1888 convention in the *Seneca County Courier*: “The first public demand for equal education, industrial, professional, and political rights for women was made in a convention held at Seneca Falls, New York (U.S.A.), in the year 1848,” the notice began. “To celebrate the fortieth anniversary of this event, an international council of women will be convened under the auspices of the National woman suffrage association.”²⁵²

What a difference, Stanton noted, between the status of women in 1848 and “this magnificent gathering of educated women from both hemispheres.” Anthony highlighted Stanton as the founder of the movement, but the program called the Conference of the Pioneers also honored many other early activists. Some of these (such as Frederick Douglass and Amy Post) had attended the original Seneca Falls convention. Others (such as Antoinette Brown Blackwell) had not.

While European Americans dominated the 1888 meeting, a few African Americans, among them Frederick Douglass and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, also attended. As one of the signers of the original Declaration of Sentiments at Seneca Falls, Douglass recalled that there were

few facts in my humble life to which I look back with more satisfaction than . . . when only a few years from slavery, [I supported] Mrs. Stanton's resolution for woman suffrage. I have done very little in this world in which to glory, except this one act, and I certainly glory in that. When I ran away from slavery, it was for myself; when I advocated emancipation, it was for my people; but when I stood up for the rights of woman, self was out of the question, and I found a little nobility in the act.²⁵³

Harper urged younger African American women to come to this meeting. “The question arises,” she wrote, “have we, the colored women, no part nor lot in this matter?” It was a question that African American women and their allies continued to ask.²⁵⁴

Throughout the late 1880s and early 1890s, Lucy Stone continued to be concerned about Stanton and Anthony's claim that Seneca Falls was the first public meeting for woman's rights. To her friend and sister-in-law Antoinette Brown Blackwell, Stone wrote in the winter of 1888, “I think we ought to puncture the bubble that the Seneca Falls meeting was the *first* public demand for suffrage.” She returned to this theme in 1890, at the fortieth anniversary of the Worcester convention, when she wrote to Brown Blackwell that “we mean to make a great occasion of it as it was the first *National W. Rights* meeting and was the one

²⁵¹ Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:67–75; Tetraault, “Memory of a Movement,” 82–83.

²⁵² *Seneca County Courier*, January 26, 1888.

²⁵³ *International Council of Women*, 329. Douglass' last act before his death in 1895 was to attend a National Council of Women meeting in Washington, D.C., sitting on the platform next to Susan B. Anthony. “Frederick Douglass, Obituary,” *The Union and Advertiser [Rochester]*, February 21, 1895.

²⁵⁴ Bettye Collier-Thomas, “Frances Ellen Watkins Harper: Abolitionist and Feminist Reformer, 1825–1911,” in *African American Women and the Vote, 1837–1965*, eds. Ann D. Gordon with Collier Thomas et al. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 53.

really to stir the public thought. There is a report of the Seneca Falls meeting but I think it was made long after the meeting.” Stone never documented her claim that the first report of Seneca Falls came long after the meeting, and her misgivings never changed the basic story: Worcester was indeed the first national convention, but Seneca Falls was the first woman’s rights convention anywhere.²⁵⁵

In 1890, the National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association merged into the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), under the presidency first of Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1890–92) and then of Susan B. Anthony (1892–1900). Lucy Stone died in 1893, leaving Anthony to dominate the national suffrage movement. With a focus exclusively on woman suffrage, NAWSA worked for both a federal woman suffrage amendment and for suffrage on a state-by-state basis.

Unification, however, brought only superficial harmony. Stanton, Gage, and others who emphasized broader reforms—including religious freedom and equality across class and racial lines—felt increasingly alienated from the dominant woman suffrage movement. As the national suffrage movement became more conservative, the liberal egalitarian wing of the woman’s rights movement (coalescing around Stanton; her daughter, Harriot Stanton Blatch; Matilda Joselyn Gage; and a few others) claimed the story of Seneca Falls as its own.

The National American Woman Suffrage Association broadened the appeal of suffrage to include large numbers of women and men within Christian churches, North and South, and encouraged the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and its immensely influential leader, Frances Willard, to support the suffrage movement. But it marginalized suffragists such as Stanton and Gage, who espoused liberal religious values, birth control, racial equality, and socialism. Stanton herself fell out of favor with the leadership of NAWSA, as she continued to assert her own egalitarian ideas, despite Anthony’s attempts to mute her voice. Stanton’s endorsement of Douglass’ second marriage, to a white woman, earned Anthony’s anger. In 1895, Stanton, Gage, and other women published *The Woman’s Bible* (a book that criticized biblical passages limiting women’s roles). Although Anthony tried valiantly, she was unable to prevent NAWSA from passing a resolution of censure against Stanton. Gage formed the Women’s National Liberal Union in 1890, edited the *National*

²⁵⁵ Lucy Stone to Antoinette Brown Blackwell, [Winter 1888], 18 September [1890], in *Friends and Sisters: Letters between Lucy Stone and Antoinette Brown Blackwell, 1846–93*, eds. Carol Lasser and Marlene Deahl Merrill (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 255, 260. In response, Brown Blackwell did her part to record the discussions that she and Lucy Stone had held with other women students at Oberlin, apparently in 1847, as a way to claim that she and Lucy Stone had initiated a precedent for women’s clubs. On April 20, 1892, she wrote to Stone in preparation for a speech at the General Federation of Women’s Clubs in Chicago: “Will you please put on your thinking cap and recollect *every thing* you can about our discussions in that little just out of village house at Oberlin? Just *who* besides ourselves took part, at least now and then! . . . No one but you and I were really in earnest, I believe, but we were, and it was a real club though without officers or constitution. . . . I mean to tell all there is to tell and not a bit more; but *it* was much more to the beginning of Clubs than that first Convention to its kind, and it shall not want an age witness historian in a modest way.” Antoinette Brown Blackwell to Lucy Stone, April 20, 1892, Lasser and Merrill, eds., *Friends and Sisters*, 261–62. Stone responded with details in May 1892: “It was at the house of a colored woman whom I was teaching to read. . . . I asked her to return the favor of my teaching by letting me have the use of her parlor one P.M. a week. She asked if there would be any boys, and I said no, and then she let us have her little parlor. You and I and Lettice Smith, and Helen Cooke and I think Elizabeth Wakely and perhaps Emmeline French. We discussed educational, political, moral & religious questions, and especially we learned to stand and speak, to put motions, how to treat amendments, &c.” Lucy Stone to Antoinette Brown Blackwell, May 5, 1892, Lasser and Merrill, eds., *Friends and Sisters*, 263. While pre-dating Seneca Falls, these discussions were not public conventions.

Citizen and Ballot Box (1878–81) and the *Liberal Thinker*, and published *Woman, Church, and State* (1893).²⁵⁶

Facing exclusion from leadership roles within the unified NAWSA, Stanton, Gage, and their friends were also growing old. As a second (and third) generation of suffragists came of age in the 1890s, they forgot the story of Seneca Falls. Stanton and her allies were there to remind them. In this context, the 1890s was a decade in which Stanton told the story of Seneca Falls again and again. Although she told the story often, she unfortunately never told it in much detail. When she did provide specific dates and names, she did not always give the same information from one telling to the next.

In 1895, for example, Stanton reiterated the story of Seneca Falls at her eightieth birthday celebration, held by the National Council of Women at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City. There, she received two silver dishes. One recognized her as the founder of the NWSA in 1869; the other honored her for her work as organizer of the Seneca Falls convention in 1848. In her address to the meeting, Stanton asserted that Seneca Falls was “the first woman’s rights convention ever held in the world.” Quoting Wendell Phillips, she noted that it was “the inauguration of the most momentous reform yet launched upon the world, the first organized protest against the injustice that has brooded for ages over the character and destiny of one-half the human race.”²⁵⁷

In 1898, the fiftieth anniversary of the Seneca Falls convention, Stanton published her autobiography, *Eighty Years and More*, based closely on articles published for several years in Clara Colby’s *Woman’s Tribune*. In it, Stanton once more told the story of Seneca Falls. In effect, Seneca Falls became part of Stanton’s own autobiography. Stanton’s story did little to reassure conservative evangelical Christian women, who increasingly dominated the mainstream suffrage movement.²⁵⁸

NAWSA billed its thirtieth annual meeting in 1898 “the fiftieth Anniversary of the first Convention ever held to demand equal rights for women.” The tone of the call for this meeting (perhaps written by Stanton) was upbeat:

In this half-century a new world has been created for woman. . . . The twentieth century belongs equally to men and women. All citizens of the United States, all friends from other countries, are cordially invited to co-operate in celebrating the semi-centennial of the first convention held for what Wendell Phillips declared to be “the most momentous reform that has yet been launched on the world.”²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ For more on the *Woman’s Bible*, see Kathi Kern, *Mrs. Stanton’s Bible* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001); Matilda Joslyn Gage, *Woman, Church, and State* (1893), reprint, Sally Roesch Wagner, ed. (Amherst, Massachusetts: Humanity Books, 2002).

²⁵⁷ Press release from Harriot Stanton Blatch, announcing her gift of these two pieces to the Smithsonian, n.d. Schlesinger Library; *Address by Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York City, on her eightieth birthday, Nov. 12, 1895*. Printed copy in the Schlesinger Library.

²⁵⁸ Stanton, *Eighty Years and More*, 148–49.

²⁵⁹ Miller, NAWSA Suffrage Scrapbooks, 1897–1911, Thirtieth Annual Convention and Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, Library of Congress, American Memory, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=rbcml&fileName=scrip1002401/rbcmilscrip1002401.db&recNum=0&itemLink=r?ammem/rbcmillerbib:@FIELD\(DOCID+@BAND\(@lit\(rbcmiller001319\)\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=rbcml&fileName=scrip1002401/rbcmilscrip1002401.db&recNum=0&itemLink=r?ammem/rbcmillerbib:@FIELD(DOCID+@BAND(@lit(rbcmiller001319))))

The celebration itself, however, was perfunctory (billed as a religious service, which likely infuriated Stanton). Matilda Joslyn Gage, who had officially entered the movement at the Syracuse woman's rights convention in Syracuse in 1852, prepared a speech for the occasion, read in abridged form in her absence. Gage credited the "heroic souls" at the Seneca Falls convention with initiating "the most unselfish reform ever launched upon the world." She argued, "From that moment, justice took fresh significance; a new era of hope and progress dawned, the meaning of freedom broadened not in this country alone but to the world."²⁶⁰

At the same time, the Sherwood Equal Rights Association, located in a small hamlet southeast of Seneca Falls, held a special meeting to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Seneca Falls. Sherwood, dominated by Quakers (including woman's rights advocate Emily Howland and her niece Isabel Howland) was a hotbed of woman's rights activism. The Sherwood meeting may have been as large or larger than the one in Washington, D.C. Between forty and fifty people heard talks on women and the law, women in education, industry, the professions, nursing, and politics.²⁶¹

Stanton died on October 26, 1902, aged eighty-seven, followed by Anthony in 1906. Their deaths cleared the way for Stanton's daughter, Harriot Stanton Blatch, to take a leadership role in the suffrage cause. Stanton Blatch revived the use of history as a tool for political organizing. In 1908, as part of a motorcade that brought suffragist speakers to upstate New York, she organized the sixtieth anniversary of the first woman's rights convention in Seneca Falls. She invited several early woman's rights activists and their children, including one signer of the declaration, Mary H. Hallowell, along with Antoinette Brown Blackwell, one of the earliest woman ministers; Mary Church Terrell, African American educator; and Stanton's cousin, Elizabeth Smith Miller.²⁶²

As an African American woman, Mary Church Terrell's participation in the 1908 anniversary was particularly important. First, her speech reflected Frederick Douglass' support of woman's rights at the original Seneca Falls convention. Second, her presence reminded her predominately European American audience that African American women continued to provide organized and strong support for woman's rights and woman suffrage. Even at the height of segregated organizing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, African American women (and some men) remained staunch woman's rights activists. Terrell was one of a strong core of African American women who arose as leaders of the National Association of Colored Women, organized in 1896. They included Ida Wells-Barnett, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin (editor of the Boston-based *Woman's Era*), Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Victoria Earle Matthews, and Mary Talbert. In New York State, the Empire

²⁶⁰ *The Thirtieth Annual Convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association and the Celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the First Woman's Rights Convention, Columbia Theatre, Washington, D.C. Religious Service, Sunday, February 13, at 3 P.M.* (n.p., [1898]), program in Schlesinger Library. Matilda Joslyn Gage, "Woman's Demand for Freedom; Its Influence Upon the World," Schlesinger Library. A note in Gage's hand identifies this as a speech given at the Columbia Theater in Washington, D.C., on February 18, 1898, but the date was undoubtedly February 13.

²⁶¹ Minutes of the Sherwood Equal Rights Association, July 20, 1898, Olin Library, Cornell University.

²⁶² [Printed program], "Anniversary Celebration of the 1848 Woman's Rights Convention, Seneca Falls, Wednesday, May 27, 1908," Seneca Falls Historical Society; speeches printed in *Papers, Seneca Falls Historical Society* (1908): 26 ff; "Place Tablet in Opera House," clipping from an unidentified newspaper in Seneca Falls Historical Society, May 26, 1908; Ellen Carol DuBois, *Harriot Stanton Blatch and the Winning of Woman Suffrage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Ellen Carol DuBois, "Making Women's History," in *Woman Suffrage & Women's Rights*, 210–238.

State Federation of Women's Clubs, a large statewide network of 103 clubs organized by African American women, actively supported woman suffrage.²⁶³

In 1915, as part of New York State's effort to pass a suffrage law, Harriot Stanton Blatch printed a brief sketch of her mother's life, and Margaret Stanton Lawrence, Stanton's other daughter, wrote an essay, never published, still in typescript at Vassar College. Most of these writings repeated standard information, including what had already been said many times about the Seneca Falls convention, but they did contain a few personal details not available elsewhere about Stanton's life.²⁶⁴

New York State finally passed woman suffrage on November 6, 1917. Almost three years later, after a seventy-two-year fight, a young legislator, Harry Byrne, cast the deciding vote in a harrowing last-minute effort in Tennessee that made woman suffrage part of the U.S. Constitution. The Nineteenth Amendment, giving women the right to vote throughout the United States, became official on August 26, 1920.²⁶⁵

Two signers of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments lived to vote, but only one actually did so. Rhoda Palmer, a member of the Congregational Friends, lived just north of Geneva, New York. She voted in November 1918, when she was 102 years old, after New York State granted suffrage to women. She died on August 9, 1919, before the federal suffrage amendment passed.²⁶⁶

One other signer, Charlotte Woodward Pierce, survived until the Nineteenth Amendment brought suffrage to women across the nation. A nineteen-year-old glove maker when she attended the Seneca Falls convention, Mrs. Pierce, aged ninety-two, was living in Philadelphia on election day in November 1920. She was ill, however, and did not go to the polls. By spring 1921, her eyesight was failing, and she was confined to her home. "I'm too old," she said. "I'm afraid I'll never vote." As far as we know, she never did. Instead, she sent a trowel to be used in laying the cornerstone for the National Woman's Party headquarters in Washington, D.C., inscribed, "In memory of the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848: presented by its sole survivor, Mrs. Charlotte L. Pierce, in thanksgiving for progress made by women and in honor of the National Woman's Party, which will carry on the struggle so bravely begun."²⁶⁷

In the 1920s, the National American Woman Suffrage Association, led by Carrie Chapman Catt, and the more radical National Woman's Party, led by Alice Paul, viewed the legacy of Seneca Falls in two very different ways. At its last meeting in 1925, NAWSA President Carrie Chapman Catt claimed the Nineteenth Amendment as the realization of everything that the signers of Seneca Falls had envisioned in 1848. "The dreams of those brave souls, who in 1848, shocked the world by their challenge, have been realized," she said. "The tedious struggle . . . never paused nor hesitated until the aim of the women of 1848 was

²⁶³ Collier-Thomas, "Frances Ellen Watkins Harper"; Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 36-106.

²⁶⁴ "Harriot Stanton Blatch, *Centennial of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (n.p., [1915]); Margaret Stanton Lawrence, "Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 1815-1915," typescript, Vassar.

²⁶⁵ The New York State Woman Suffrage Association transformed itself into an educational group to prepare women for their roles as citizens, with committees on education, Americanization, legislation, Congressional work, labor, intelligence, rural problems, and war service. *The Nation*, June 1, 1918.

²⁶⁶ "Miss Rhoda Palmer Dies at Advanced Age of 103 Years," *Geneva Daily Times*, August 11, 1919; "Miss Rhoda Palmer Gives Reminiscences," *Geneva Daily Times*, June 24, 1916.

²⁶⁷ "Oldest Suffragist Hits Woman's Party," June 2, [1921], clipping in National American Woman Suffrage Association file, Library of Congress; Wellman, *Road to Seneca Falls*, 231-32.

written in the constitution.” Although NAWSA named the Nineteenth Amendment the Susan B. Anthony Amendment, the M’Clintock tea table, around which Stanton and the M’Clintocks had drafted the Declaration of Sentiments, became the centerpiece of an exhibit in the Smithsonian Institution. When NAWSA disbanded, its members formed the League of Women Voters to educate women to use their new role as voting citizens wisely.²⁶⁸

While NAWSA celebrated the Nineteenth Amendment as a victory of everything that the Seneca Falls convention had demanded, Alice Paul and many younger suffragists thought that nothing that the signers of the Seneca Falls declaration asked for in 1848 had been won *except* the vote. Everything else was still unrealized. Battle-scarred from White House picketing, jail time, and force-feeding, they formed the National Woman’s Party. On February 15, 1921, they unveiled a new statue in the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol. Sculpted by Adelaide Johnson, the statue incorporated Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and Susan B. Anthony. In the early 1920s, the National Woman’s Party returned to Seneca Falls. Citing the Declaration of Sentiments as both inspiration and a road map for the future, they introduced a new goal, an Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.²⁶⁹

WHAT HISTORIANS HAVE SAID ABOUT SENECA FALLS

Historian Activists, 1920–1959

After the United States ratified the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, scholars began to incorporate the story of Seneca Falls into biographies of early woman’s rights leaders. They also produced two remarkable narratives. In 1946, Mary Beard published *Woman as Force in History*. Beard was critical of the equal rights demands raised at Seneca Falls because, she argued, such demands were too limited. In 1959, Eleanor Flexner wrote the second narrative, *Century of Struggle*. By summarizing and transcending the best scholarship on the woman’s movement up to the time, *Century of Struggle* provided a baseline for all future work.²⁷⁰

Scholars in this period worked in the context of public debates between feminists in the National Woman’s Party, who advocated an Equal Rights Amendment (first introduced at Seneca Falls in 1923), women’s labor activists (who endorsed protective labor laws for women workers), and women who saw themselves as citizen-activists. Women across the country joined local community boosters in key public celebrations of Seneca Falls, particularly at the seventy-fifth and hundredth anniversaries of the convention in 1923 and 1948.

In 1923, the National Woman’s Party came to Seneca Falls to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Seneca Falls convention. Attendees brought Seneca Falls once more to national attention by announcing a new demand: an Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Written by Alice Paul in 1921, the proposed amendment read: “Equality of

²⁶⁸ Wellman, *Road to Seneca Falls*, 232. Catt to the Executive Council of NAWSA, March 12, 1925, National American Woman Suffrage Association Papers, Library of Congress. Carrie Chapman Catt donated the NAWSA collection to the Library of Congress in 1938. www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9607/suffrage.html; memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/suffrage/millerscrapbooks/about.

²⁶⁹ Promptly dubbed “Three Ladies in a Bathtub,” Johnson’s statue was moved immediately to a small space in the Capitol basement called the Crypt, where it remained until May 1997. *On the Issues* (Fall 1997).

²⁷⁰ Mary Beard, *Woman as Force in History: A Study in Traditions and Realities* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), reprinted 1962; Flexner, *Century of Struggle*.

Rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex.”

In the Seneca Falls Presbyterian Church, Alice Paul announced that “the work of the Woman’s Party is only a continuation of the fight for Equal Rights instituted in 1843 [*sic*], and it will go on until every trace of discrimination against women has vanished. . . . There shall be no inequalities between men and women within the United States or any place subject to its jurisdiction.” A pageant of young women dressed in Grecian costumes represented woman’s advances through the ages. Socialite Mrs. O.H.P. Belmont, president of the National Woman’s Party, reminded the audience, drawn from every state in the Union, that they stood “on sacred ground, . . . the birth place of Woman’s emancipation. We shall come again to Seneca Falls;—come again in great triumph, to lay before this shrine our final trophies of victory, carrying high our banner.” At the end of the conference in Seneca Falls, more than one hundred cars carried people on a pilgrimage from Seneca Falls to Susan B. Anthony’s house in Rochester, New York. The Lucretia Mott amendment, or the Equal Rights Amendment, as it came to be called, still remained before the country in 2008.²⁷¹

Carol Rehfisch, secretary of the California branch of the National Woman’s Party, reinforced the connection between Seneca Falls and the Equal Rights Amendment. She declared that

The movement for Equal Rights presents one continuous line of endeavor from the time of the first Equal Rights meeting in 1848 in Seneca Falls down to the recent Equal Rights Conference held by the Woman’s Party at this same place on the seventy-fifth anniversary date of the first meeting. The program adopted at the Seneca Falls meeting of 1848 called for complete Equality between the rights of men and women. . . . The program outlined by the women of 1848 was, we found, identical with that of the Woman’s Party today—with the one exception of the demand for Equality in the franchise.²⁷²

The debate between the National Woman’s Party and the old National American Woman Suffrage Association was in part generational. It was also part of a battle over who owned the history of the movement itself. Before 1920, argued Ellen DuBois, women’s rights advocates had created what DuBois called a “master narrative” of the movement, “a single, controlling version of women’s rights history; that in the early nineteenth century, American women had begun to ‘awaken,’ to follow the road that lay waiting to lead them to ‘advancement’ through higher education and the opening up of the professions, past temperance societies and women’s clubs, ultimately to arrive at the temple of political equality.” This was, wrote DuBois, “a frozen account of the past, a history characterized by celebration, inevitability and canonization, as well as by a rigid separation between public achievement and personal life.” Both wings of the suffrage movement laid claim to this history.²⁷³

²⁷¹ Wellman, *Road to Seneca Falls*, 232–33. Amy Butler, *Two Paths to Equality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), recorded the controversy in the 1920s between ERA proponents led by Alice Paul and those who advocated protective labor legislation for women, led by Ethel M. Smith. Hazel MacKaye orchestrated the 1923 pageant in Seneca Falls as a deliberate public relations event, 67–70. *Geneva Daily Times*, July 21, 1923, and July 23, 1923.

²⁷² Carol Rehfisch, “Historical Background of the Equal Rights Campaign,” *Equal Rights* 1 (15 September 1923): 245–46.

²⁷³ DuBois, “Making Women’s History,” *Woman’s Suffrage & Women’s Rights*, 215.

By the 1920s, as Nancy Cott argued in *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, a new feminist vision, based on personal and sexual expression, had taken hold among a younger generation of women, replacing the older generation's view of selfless woman's rights activism based on sexual purity and motherhood. In this context, several new biographies of woman's rights leaders emphasized their personal and often their sexual lives. As DuBois noted, "there was something unavoidably competitive in the rewriting of women's history in this period; elevating one woman seems to have involved denigrating another." Harriot Stanton Blatch, associated with the National Woman's Party, became especially protective of her mother's memory, perhaps as suffragists began to label the Nineteenth Amendment, which her mother had drafted in 1878, the "Susan B. Anthony amendment," or perhaps as Alice Stone Blackwell in turn tried to explain the perspective of her mother, Lucy Stone. Whatever the reason, Harriot Stanton Blatch took it upon herself to defend the memory of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. In so doing, she countered the popular image of her mother's friend Susan B. Anthony as the movement's heroine and saint. And history was one of her most potent weapons.²⁷⁴

In 1922, Harriot Stanton Blatch and her brother Theodore Stanton published an edited version of their mother's letters and diaries in two volumes. *Elizabeth Cady Stanton as Revealed in Her Letters, Diary, and Reminiscences* proved frustrating to modern scholars because it often omitted key passages or combined two or more letters into one. In some cases, Stanton and Blatch destroyed original materials. Stanton papers at Douglass College, rediscovered in the late 1970s, included slips of paper with Stanton's signatures, minus the letters themselves, suggesting that Stanton and Blatch had cut out the signatures and thrown away the letters.²⁷⁵

About the same time, Carrie Chapman Catt and Nettie Rogers Shuler published *Woman Suffrage and Politics*. Working primarily from records of the National American Woman Suffrage Association and the *History of Woman Suffrage*, Catt and Shuler viewed both the Seneca Falls and Rochester conventions as the continuation of a long debate about the rights and roles of women in the United States. Even though these were local conventions, they noted,

newspapers throughout the country regarded them as an innovation worthy of comment and full press accounts were carried far and wide. Preceding events had prepared the country for controversy centred [*sic*] upon the subject of woman's rights apart from the anti-slavery and temperance causes, and a widespread discussion for and against the long list of liberties claimed was inaugurated by the two conventions.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Dorr, *Susan B. Anthony*; Alice Stone Blackwell, *Lucy Stone: Pioneer of Women's Rights* (1930; repr. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2001).

²⁷⁵ See DuBois, "Making Women's History," 225–26, for more details on Blatch's attitudes toward Anthony and defense of her mother. Stanton and Blatch, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton as Revealed in Her Letters, Diary, and Reminiscences*. For a discussion of problems with Stanton's recollections in general and with this collection in particular, see Dykeman, "To Pour Forth from My Own Experience," *Journal of the Rutgers University Libraries* 44, no. 1 (1982): 1–16; Ann D. Gordon, "Afterword," *Eighty Years and More*, 469–83; Estelle C. Jelinek, *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography*, 108–27; Kathi Kern, *Mrs. Stanton's Bible*, 1–4. These comments also come from my own experience comparing the Stanton and Blatch printed edition with original Stanton manuscripts.

²⁷⁶ Catt and Shuler, *Woman Suffrage and Politics*, 20.

In the early 1930s, Blatch began to work with Alma Lutz, a member of the National Woman's Party, to write a full-length biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Perhaps influenced, as DuBois suggested, by the new expressive feminism of the 1920s, Blatch broke away from the "master narrative" and shared details with Lutz of her mother's sexual life, including a possible love affair with her brother-in-law, Edward Bayard.²⁷⁷

Published in 1940, after Blatch's death, Lutz's biography, *Created Equal: A Biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton*, appeared without footnotes. It was nevertheless carefully based both in archival sources (including Stanton's autobiography, the Stanton and Blatch edited volumes, and oral interviews with Blatch). Lutz's notes, available in the Vassar College archives, reveal her to have been a careful researcher. Although caught by chronological errors recorded by Stanton or her children, Lutz created the clearest and most coherent narrative of the Seneca Falls convention that had so far appeared. With few exceptions, subsequent references to the Seneca Falls convention derived from it.²⁷⁸

Even as Harriot Stanton Blatch and Alma Lutz revived awareness of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Seneca Falls convention, another historian, also a woman's rights activist, challenged the importance of the early woman's rights movement. In 1933, Mary Beard published *America Through Woman's Eyes*, a compilation of women's perspectives on U.S. history that included selections from the *History of Woman Suffrage* and from Blatch herself. Beard's focus was not on the woman's movement so much as it was on the transition from household labor to factory work and on partnerships rather than conflict between men and women. "Subjection," Beard wrote, was a "false theory which dominated the women of 1848."²⁷⁹

Blatch was disappointed that Beard had not recognized the importance of Elizabeth Cady Stanton in this volume. Blatch had deposited Stanton's papers in the Library of Congress, and when Beard began to read them, she was amazed to find that Stanton was "a basic thinker." Beard wrote to Blatch, "I am honestly stirred to my deeps." "That reiteration of ignorance and poverty by your mother moves me intensely. I was so ignorant that I feared I should not find the fundamental economic thought. Thank God, it is there!"²⁸⁰

In 1946, in *Woman as a Force in History*, Beard vehemently attacked equal rights feminism. Although her position found few adherents, it provoked (and continues to provoke) debate. She argued that the antebellum woman's movement, claiming to demand equality for women in the context of generations of oppression, was based on false assumptions. While Seneca Falls may have initiated an organized women's movement, it was not a new assertion of women's power. Women had always been powerful. For most of

²⁷⁷ DuBois, "Making Women's History," *Woman's Suffrage & Women's Rights*, 226.

²⁷⁸ Alma Lutz, *Created Equal: A Biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (New York: John Day, 1940). For example, Lutz repeated the anecdote about a dislocated shoulder that was attributed to Daniel in the Stanton and Blatch work, when that incident most likely related to Theodore. See Lutz, *Created Equal*, 36–37.

²⁷⁹ Nancy Cott, *A Woman Making History: Mary Ritter Beard Through Her Letters* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1991), 35, 40, 50, 109.

²⁸⁰ Beard's positive assessment of Stanton continued through her publication of *The American Spirit* (1942) and *America at Mid-Passage* (1939), both co-authored with her husband Charles Beard. In *The American Spirit*, she argued that "rights always remained, for the philosophers of the woman movement, only one interest among many—fundamental, it is true, but never all-inclusive respecting the purpose of the movement." Mary R. Beard to Harriot Blatch, January 24, [1937], quoted in Cott, *A Woman Making History*, 109, 164–65.

history, women had been a force “so constant and general that forty volumes, if any number, would hardly suffice to give the record which sustains this generalization.”²⁸¹

If anything, Beard contended, Seneca Falls represented a step backward. At Seneca Falls, rather than arguing for “women’s force, potentialities, and obligations,” women claimed equality, an old and essentially limiting concept, “hoary with age and revolutionary associations. . . . The utter simplification of historic processes, the propagandistic convenience, and the flavor of utopian grandeur represented by equality furnished fuel for a fiery crusade.”²⁸²

Beard particularly attacked Stanton’s use of Blackstone’s *Codes* as a cause of woman’s subjection in the 1840s. American colonists, she argued, had begun to erode English common law from the moment they set foot on American soil, and by the 1840s, equity courts had so thoroughly undercut provisions regarding married women that they were no longer viable. “In other words,” she concluded, “Blackstone’s ornate dictum that ‘the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during marriage,’ . . . false when made—was no universal rule of American law in 1840 or earlier.”²⁸³

“The Seneca Falls women gave no indication of knowing a fact about women in history,” she wrote in 1948.

But the 48ers and Susan adhered to an absolutist dogma and in its propagandistic use . . . A VITAL NEED IN EDUCATION IS TO ESTABLISH WOMEN IN HISTORY AS PARTICIPANTS IN THE MAKING OF ALL HISTORY AS THEY WERE IN REALITY. . . . This reality transcends the cult of feminism, of equality, of superiority and inferiority credos. Equality is not enough and while that is the cult ideal, in the dearth of historical knowledge it will be a mere sex war. Say I.²⁸⁴

Another overview, specifically on women in New York, appeared in the 1930s. Written by Amy Gilbert for Alexander Flick’s multivolume *History of New York State*, it was a straightforward account, noteworthy for emphasizing women’s history within the context of New York State history.²⁸⁵

Along with historical references to Seneca Falls, women’s rights activists continued to refer to Seneca Falls in the public sphere. In 1936, Governor Herbert Lehman of New York declared Stanton’s 126th birthday, “Elizabeth Cady Stanton Day,” and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt sent congratulations to the Business and Professional Women’s Club in Johnstown, New York. The National Woman’s Party republished the Declaration of Sentiments in 1937, continuing to emphasize that none of its demands except the vote had yet been won.²⁸⁶

In 1940, in the context of totalitarian expansion in Europe and Asia, Seneca Falls became a symbol both of women’s rights and human rights. Chaired by Carrie Chapman

²⁸¹ Beard, *Woman as Force in History*, 282–83.

²⁸² Beard, *Woman as Force in History*, 159.

²⁸³ Beard, *Woman as Force in History*, 126.

²⁸⁴ Cott, *A Woman Making History*, 304–5.

²⁸⁵ Amy Gilbert, in *History of the State of New York*, 10 vols., ed. by Alexander Flick (New York: Columbia University, 1933–37).

²⁸⁶ Wellman, *Road to Seneca Falls*, 233–34; Newspaper clipping, n.p., n.d., Johnstown Historical Society; *How Long Will Women Wait for Liberty?* (Washington, D.C.: National Woman’s Party, 1937); Marianne Leslie Black to Katherine Devereux Blake, 22 July 1943, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

Catt, the World's Centennial Congress in New York City that year (including Eleanor Roosevelt, author Pearl Buck, anthropologist Margaret Mead, and labor activist Rose Schneiderman) made the connection with Seneca Falls explicit. They presented a skit by Vassar College students about the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and adopted a Declaration of Purpose that dedicated women "to use our freedom to work for the progressive securing of freedom, social justice, and peace for all people." *Time* magazine interpreted this text to mean that the women's movement "was no longer explicitly feminist," because "totalitarianism in destroying civil rights seldom discriminates between men and women."²⁸⁷

In 1948, women's rights advocates from all over the country joined to celebrate the centennial of the Seneca Falls convention. Organized locally, it attracted about two thousand visitors, with a U.S. commemorative stamp, a telegram from President Truman, and a proclamation from Governor Thomas Dewey. Dorothy Kenyon, U.S. delegate to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, was the keynote speaker. "We have the vote," she declared. "What we are doing with the vote is another matter." Anna Lord Strauss, Lucretia Mott's great-granddaughter and president of the League of Women Voters, echoed that thought: "We as women will have more opportunities not in promoting a woman's block or proclaiming a new woman's movement but by taking full advantage of those opportunities now open to us. Let us think of ourselves as citizens first and our role as women second."²⁸⁸

Not everyone agreed. Thirty-four women, including Susan B. Anthony II, Nora Stanton Barney (Stanton's granddaughter), Pearl Buck, Alice Hamilton, Margaret Sanger, and Mrs. Henry Wallace signed the "Declaration of the Women of 1948 to the Women of 2048." They noted that "a pall of atomic fear blankets our land in 1948" and pledged that

we will win for ourselves and therefore for you, our freedom as women to bear and rear our children, to share equally with our brothers, our land's productive labor in the factory, on the farm, at the desk, and on the bench. We will win our freedom to share equally with our brothers the highest offices in all organs of the body politic. We will win for you a prosperous democracy at peace with the world.²⁸⁹

The *Christian Science Monitor* noted with approval, "There is still need for those fighters who are carrying on in the spirit of Seneca Falls and who now stand closer than ever before to the fulfillment of their dream of an equal rights amendment to the Constitution." The *Ladies Home Journal* was even more direct: "No one is so deceived as to believe that women today enjoy complete equality with men. . . . [T]hey are still discriminated against because of sex only."²⁹⁰

Three groups were conspicuously absent from the 1948 celebration. The National Woman's Party continued to focus its energies only on the Equal Rights Amendment. The

²⁸⁷ *Woman's Centennial Congress, November 25, 26, 27, 1940, Hotel Commodore, New York City*, Minutes in Sophia Smith Collection, Smith; *Declaration of Purpose Adopted by the Woman's Centennial Congress, November 25-27, 1940, New York City*, Smith; *Time*, December 9, 1940, 16-17.

²⁸⁸ Wellman, *Road to Seneca Falls*, 234-36; *Syracuse Post-Standard*, July 20, 1948; *Syracuse Herald-Journal*, July 28, 1948.

²⁸⁹ *Declaration of the Women of 1948 to the Women of 2048*, Seneca Falls Historical Society. Handwritten note on this copy: "Read by Susan B. Anthony II at Mass Meeting of Centenary of Woman's Rights Convention, July 20th, 1948, Seneca Falls, New York."

²⁹⁰ Wellman, *Road to Seneca Falls*, 236; *Christian Science Monitor*, July 20, 1948, Smith College; *Ladies Home Journal*, July 1948, clipping in Seneca Falls Historical Society.

Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor focused on protective labor legislation for women and did not endorse equal rights. Most of the discrimination against women in 1948 was not the result of the law but of custom, argued Frida Miller, director of the Women's Bureau. African American women had been noticeably absent from organized commemorations of Seneca Falls since Mary Church Terrell's speech in honor of Frederick Douglass in 1908. In 1948, however, the Congress of American Women held a service at Stanton's grave in Woodlawn Cemetery in New York City, with speeches by Nora Stanton Barney, Elizabeth Cady Stanton's granddaughter, and Haley G. Douglass, Frederick Douglass' grandson. (Haley Douglass also attended a similar ceremony at Anthony's grave in Rochester, New York.) A radio program in Spanish of the pageant at Seneca Falls, sponsored by the United Nations, suggested increasing international interest in the Seneca Falls convention.²⁹¹

By the late 1940s, positive assessments of women reflected in the work of Alma Lutz, Amy Gilbert, and Mary Beard (as well as in the nationally successful centennial celebration of the Seneca Falls convention) were being replaced by more far more negative evaluations of women's roles. Typical was the antifeminist work of Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia Farnham, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, published in 1947. Only members of the National Woman's Party, led by Alice Paul, called themselves feminists. In the 1950s, during anticommunist agitation and cold war politics, many labor and leftist women, including Dorothy Kenyon were blacklisted.²⁹²

In this context, few people cared about the historic resources relating to the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention. One popular writer, Constance Buel Burnett, however, kept the ideals of Seneca Falls available to a large public audience through her biography of Lucretia Mott (*Lucretia Mott: Girl of Old Nantucket*) and her collection of women's rights biographies, *Five for Freedom: Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony, Carrie Chapman Catt*. Buel Burnett dedicated this book "to the hundreds of women who campaigned with tireless energy and courage for the Nineteenth Amendment." While Buel Burnett did not add anything new to the well-known story, she deserves considerable credit for telling it at all in the 1950s. She did so because "the story of these women is the story of Democracy," she asserted, "maturing, civilizing, and ennobling the race. It is a process of growth to which all free men and women are dedicated."²⁹³

In 1959, in the context of this antifeminist backlash, Eleanor Flexner, a graduate of Swarthmore College and an independent scholar with a background in theater and social activism, produced a remarkable history of the woman's movement up to 1920. *Century of Struggle* was both a reflection of the first wave of feminist historical writing and a precursor of the second wave. With a second edition in 1975, *Century of Struggle* remains a singular achievement. In it, Flexner laid down a basic paradigm that has dominated our understanding of the nineteenth-century woman's movement ever since, emphasizing the importance of race and class in understanding the woman's movement, as well as the

²⁹¹ Wellman, *Road to Seneca Falls*, 236; "CAW Celebrates the Seneca Falls Centennial," *Around the World, A Publication of the Congress of American Women . . . Affiliated with the Women's International Democratic Federation* 1, no. 5 (July-August, 1948); *Berkshire Evening Eagle*, July 22, 1848; Eva Candia, "La Mujer y la Paz (Centenario do la Covencion de Seneca Falls), Division de Radio de Las Naciones Unidas [1948].

²⁹² Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia Farnham, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947).

²⁹³ Constance Buel Burnett, *Five for Freedom: Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony, Carrie Chapman Catt* (New York: Abelard Press, 1953).

organizational development of the movement from 1848 to the 1920s. Although extensive new research has vastly expanded our knowledge, Flexner's narrative remains a basic reference, important for her careful use of primary sources, clear prose, and attention to detail.²⁹⁴

Flexner devoted one whole chapter to the Seneca Falls convention. Based primarily on Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Eighty Years and More*; Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*; Alma Lutz, *Created Equal*; Otelia Cromwell, *Lucretia Mott*; Rheta Childe Dorr, *Susan B. Anthony*; and the minutes of the convention, Flexner's work was the best account of the Seneca Falls meeting written up to that time.²⁹⁵

Flexner recognized the Seneca Falls convention as the "birth of the movement for woman's rights." She argued that the convention launched a movement that "would leave its imprint on the lives of their daughters and of women throughout the world." She recognized, however, that the Seneca Falls convention did not emerge suddenly, without historical antecedents. In fact, she argued, "in regarding the Seneca Falls convention as the birth of the movement for woman's rights, we are on solid ground only if we remember that birth is a stage in the whole process of growth. In this case the process had begun almost half a century earlier." She concluded, "Such a view does not detract from the convention's importance, or from the vision and courage of those who brought it about."²⁹⁶

When Flexner revised her study in 1975, she noted that "today's debt to [those who attended the Seneca Falls convention] has been inadequately acknowledged." That lack of acknowledgement was reflected in the status of the Wesleyan Chapel. It was used as a garage in the 1950s and then as a self-service laundry, reported Flexner, and only a sign on the sidewalk hinted at the chapel's importance.²⁹⁷

Reclaiming Seneca Falls, 1959–2005

The Second Wave Begins

Beginning in the 1960s, a new generation of women, trained historians who were both scholars and activists influenced by the second wave of feminism, began to explore the early woman's rights movement. The National Defense Education Act and other sources of public and private fellowships made it possible for students from middle and working classes, of various ethnic and racial groups (including for the first time since the early twentieth century significant numbers of women) to attend graduate schools. Carrying their awareness of the civil rights and feminist movements into their scholarly work, historians renewed their interest in abolitionism, labor reform, and the woman's rights movement.

From the 1970s through the 1990s, historians produced several overviews of the women's movement. Almost all of them mentioned the Seneca Falls convention, and most of them followed the paradigm outlined by Eleanor Flexner. Flexner told her story of Seneca

²⁹⁴ Flexner, *Century of Struggle*; Ellen Carol DuBois, "Eleanor Flexner and the History of American Feminism," *Woman Suffrage & Women's Rights*, 248.

²⁹⁵ Stanton, *Eighty Years and More*; Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:68; Alma Lutz, *Created Equal: A Biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (New York: The John Day Company, 1940); Otelia Cromwell, *Lucretia Mott* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958); Dorr, *Susan B. Anthony*.

²⁹⁶ Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 77.

²⁹⁷ Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 77, 362.

Falls with such clarity and authority that, with few exceptions, it dominated all subsequent narratives. This version of the Seneca Falls story, told from Stanton's own perspective, was the one that Ross Evans Paulsen characterized in 1974 as the "legend" of Seneca Falls. Despite ubiquitous references to Seneca Falls in almost every U.S. history textbook since the 1970s, however, historians added little new information to our knowledge of Seneca Falls between 1959 and the 1980s.

Historians who studied other parts of the woman's rights story also adopted Flexner's narrative as their matrix. By and large, they took Flexner's monumental achievement for granted. As Ellen DuBois suggested,

so closely did our perspective come to Flexner's that I think, ironically, we simply absorbed her work without fully appreciating how original and innovative it was. Since then, I hope those of us who study women's history have learned to understand feminism as part of a larger history of social movements, particularly those challenging class and racial inequality. And to the degree that this "sex/class/race" framework is a feminist commonplace now, Eleanor Flexner's historical vision deserves some of the credit.²⁹⁸

Document Collections, Biographical Dictionaries, and Edited Manuscripts

Early in the 1970s, historians began to publish collections of key woman's rights documents. Accessibility to these sources opened up entirely new avenues of research that vastly expanded our understanding of Seneca Falls and the early woman's rights movement.

One of the first and most important of these was Alice Rossi, *The Feminist Papers* (1974). Rossi's extensive introduction provided articulate analyses of many major feminist topics and issues, still unsurpassed for their thoughtfulness and sophistication. Rossi called the Seneca Falls signers "moral crusader feminists" as opposed to "Enlightenment feminists," such as Margaret Fuller and Frances Wright, who were highly urban, sophisticated, solitary thinkers and writers. By contrast, the moral crusader feminists were almost all native-born, middle-class Americans from rural areas or small towns. They were decidedly not cosmopolitan, urban, or worldly in their thinking or lifestyles. What motivated their efforts in behalf of women, asserted Rossi, was less a radical impulse expressed through their pens than a moral impulse acted out in the political arena. Later research took issue with Rossi's characterization of the Seneca Falls woman's rights advocates as lacking in cosmopolitan awareness, but her basic categorization remains useful.²⁹⁹

Biographical dictionaries also provided important access to major figures associated with Seneca Falls and the early woman's rights movement. *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary, 1607-1950*, edited by Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer (1971), was an essential benchmark for contemporary scholarship on individual women. It included selections on leaders who attended the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention (Elizabeth Cady Stanton, written by Alma Lutz; Lucretia Mott, by Frederick Tolles; and Martha Wright, by Paul Messbarger). Early versions of the *Dictionary of American Biography* and *Appleton's Cyclopedia* incorporated references to some of the better-known male signers and those affiliated with the convention, including Daniel Cady, Frederick Douglass, Henry Brewster Stanton, and Elisha Foote. *American National*

²⁹⁸ DuBois, "Eleanor Flexner," in *Woman Suffrage & Women's Rights*, 249.

²⁹⁹ Alice Rossi, *The Feminist Papers: From Adams to de Beauvoir* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 241, 248. Two other important collections were Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), Reprint 1992, and Miriam Schneir, *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings* (New York: Vintage, 1972), Reprint 1992.

Biography (1998) included new entries relevant to Seneca Falls, on Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the M'Clintocks, and Daniel Cady. Catherine Clinton and Christine Lunardini edited *The Columbia Guide to American Women in the Nineteenth Century* (2000), a combination of topical narrative overviews and short descriptions of people and events. In 2005, the *Encyclopedia of New York State* included an entry for the women's movement in New York State, with a reference to the Seneca Falls convention. Although no known African American women attended the Seneca Falls convention, many African American women did become woman's rights advocates. Darlene Clark, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Roslyn Terbor-Penn, *Black Women in America* (1993), as well as the earlier *Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life: Their Words, Their Thoughts, Their Feelings* (1976), edited by Bert James Loewenberg and Ruth Bogin, offered informative overviews.³⁰⁰

Early in the 1970s, scholars began to survey manuscript collections relating to women's history. Albert Krichmar made an early attempt to assess the current state of the field in the second wave of feminism in *The Women's Rights Movement in the United States, 1848-1970: A Bibliography and Sourcebook* (1972). In this work, Krichmar noted a wide variety of books and articles relating to the woman's rights and woman's suffrage movements from 1848 to 1870. In 1980, the National Archives highlighted its collections relating to women in Mabel Deutrich, ed., *Clio Was A Woman*. One article in this book, by Judith Wellman, surveyed the abolitionist petitions sent by women from upstate New York in the 1830s and 1840s, noting the importance of Waterloo as a source of petitions in general and women's petitions in particular.³⁰¹

Several edited collections of manuscripts appeared in the late twentieth century that initiated a whole new approach to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the early woman's rights movement, and the story of Seneca Falls. In 1981, Ellen Carol DuBois edited *Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony: Correspondence, Writing, Speeches*. Most important for future scholars, Pat Holland and Ann Gordon began their lifelong work on publishing the papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. The microfilm edition appeared in 1991, and the first hard-copy volumes of *The Selected Papers* appeared in 1997.³⁰²

³⁰⁰ *Notable American Women, 1607-1950*, eds. Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 1971); Judith Wellman, "Daniel Cady," and (with Christopher Densmore) "Thomas and Mary Ann M'Clintock," *American National Biography*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998; Judith Wellman, "Elizabeth Cady Stanton," *Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Vol. I, ed. Paul Lauter (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1990); Catherine Clinton and Christine Lunardini, *The Columbia Guide to American Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Judith Wellman, "The Women's Movement in New York State, 1848-1990," *Encyclopedia of New York State* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004); Darlene Clark, Elsa Barkley Brown, Roslyn Terbor-Penn, eds., *Black Women in America* (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Publishing, 1993); Bert James Loewenberg and Ruth Bogin, eds., *Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life: Their Words, Their Thoughts, Their Feelings* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976).

³⁰¹ Albert Krichmar, *Women's Rights Movement in the United States* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973); Judith Wellman, "Women and Radical Reform in Antebellum Upstate New York: A Profile of Grass Roots Female Abolitionists," in *Clio Was A Woman*, ed. Mabel Deutrich (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1980).

³⁰² Ellen Carol DuBois, ed., *Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony: Correspondence, Writing, Speeches* (New York: Northeastern University Press, 1981). This collection reprinted one of Stanton's speeches, first delivered at Junius Monthly Meeting, Waterloo, in September 1848, and then again at the organization meeting of Congregational Friends at Farmington, New York, October 5-6, 1848, from the tract series printed by Robert J. Johnson in 1870, under

Two major figures related to Seneca Falls, Lucretia Mott and Frederick Douglass, were the subjects of editing projects in the late twentieth century. Beverly Wilson Palmer edited *Selected Letters of Lucretia Coffin Mott* (2002), and Dana Greene edited *Lucretia Mott: Her Complete Speeches and Sermons* (1980). *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, edited by John Blassingame (1979–92) added to Philip S. Foner's edition of *Frederick Douglass on Women's Rights* (1976) and C. Peter Ripley, ed., *The Black Abolitionist Papers* (1985–92) to provide a baseline of material for key African Americans abolitionists and feminists.³⁰³

Other significant collections relating to Seneca Falls included Amelia Bloomer's speeches (edited by Anne C. Coon, 1994), selected letters from Angelina and Sarah Grimké (edited by Gilbert Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond, 1934, and Larry Ceplair, 1989), and the William Lloyd Garrison Papers (edited by Louis Ruchames, 1971).³⁰⁴

For Lucy Stone, one of the key woman's rights leaders of the early movement, the most important selections of her letters are Leslie Wheeler, ed., *Loving Warriors: Selected Letters of Lucy Stone and Henry B. Blackwell, 1853–1893* (1981) and Carol Lasser and Marlene Deahl Merrill, eds., *Friends and Sisters: Letters between Lucy Stone and Antoinette Brown Blackwell, 1846–93* (1987).

The Library of Congress has made available many books, pamphlets, artifacts, and scrapbooks from the National American Woman Suffrage Association in a model project developed online in digital format.³⁰⁵

Papers relating to many people associated with the Seneca Falls convention and the early woman's rights movement are still unavailable in edited versions. While the Abby Kelley Foster Papers at the Worcester Historical Society and the American Antiquarian Society have been microfilmed, no hard-copy edition exists. High priority should be given to these papers and to the Martha Wright Papers in the Garrison Family Papers at Smith College; the Post Family Papers at the University of Rochester; and the papers of the Blackwell Family, Sidney Howard Gay, Lydia Maria Child, Gerrit Smith, the Howland Family, and Isabella Beecher Hooker.

The importance of making these manuscript collections available, perhaps in digital form, cannot be overstated. From the nineteenth century to the present, serious scholarly

the title *Address Delivered at Seneca Falls and Rochester, New York*. Stanton did not in fact deliver this speech at the Seneca Falls convention. Patricia Holland and Ann D. Gordon, eds., *The Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1991), Microform; Ann D. Gordon, ed., *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, 5 vols. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997–2006).

³⁰³ Beverly Wilson Palmer, ed., *Selected Letters of Lucretia Coffin Mott* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Dana Greene, ed., *Lucretia Mott: Her Complete Speeches and Sermons* (New York: Edmund Mellon Press, 1980); John Blassingame, ed., *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979–92); Philip S. Foner, ed. *Frederick Douglass on Women's Rights* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976); C. Peter Ripley, ed., *The Black Abolitionist Papers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1985–92).

³⁰⁴ Anne C. Coon, ed., *Hear Me Patiently: The Reform Speeches of Amelia Jenks Bloomer* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994); Gilbert Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond, eds., *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké Weld, and Sarah Grimké*. 2 vols. 1934. Reprint (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1965); Larry Ceplair, ed., *The Public Years of Sarah and Angelina Grimké: Selected Writings, 1835–1839* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Louis Ruchames, ed., *Letters of William Lloyd Garrison* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press / Harvard University Press, 1971).

³⁰⁵ *Votes for Women: Selections from the National American Woman Suffrage Collection, 1848–1921*, memory.loc.gov/ammem/naw/nawshome.html

work relating to the Seneca Falls convention has been delayed or denied because access to the sources has been so difficult.

Seneca Falls in the Context of the Woman's Rights Movement

Historical writing on Seneca Falls in the late twentieth century occurred in the context of an emerging feminist movement in the 1960s—the second wave of the woman's movement in United States history—which created new vitality in the writing of women's history generally. The remainder of this section will review the emergence of women's history from a chronological perspective, up to the mid-1990s, showing its relationship to Seneca Falls. Then it will explore specific topics relating to the Seneca Falls convention. Finally, it will look at recent historiography, from 1998 (the 150th anniversary of the Seneca Falls convention) to the present.

National Background

Beginning in the 1960s, the explosion of writing about women's history was a direct result of the second wave of the women's movement itself. Just as the first wave of the women's movement had emerged from the abolitionist crusade, so the second wave began in the context of the civil rights movement. Key milestones included President Kennedy's creation of the President's Commission on Women, chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, in 1963; publication of Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* in 1963; passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964; and creation of the National Organization for Women in 1966. A variety of women's liberation groups emerged in the late 1960s. In the early 1970s, feminists organized nationally around several interest groups, including the National Black Feminists, the Women's Political Caucus, Redstockings, and the Coalition of Labor Union Women, bringing a new grassroots base of support for women's issues. In 1972, Congress approved the Equal Rights Amendment by an overwhelming margin, and the Supreme Court made a woman's right to choose an abortion legal under carefully defined conditions. The American people as a whole seemed to endorse key parts of a feminist agenda.

In this context, Americans began to rediscover Seneca Falls. The rediscovery provided a context for congressional authorization in 1980 of Women's Rights National Historical Park in Seneca Falls, New York, and the eventual preservation of the resources associated with that park. It also deepened our understanding not only of the Seneca Falls convention but of the entire early woman's rights movement.

In 1977, promoted by the United Nations, the United States celebrated International Women's Year, initiating a formal "decade of women." Relay runners carried a torch from Seneca Falls to the opening ceremonies in Houston, Texas. Poet Maya Angelou read a new declaration, "To Form a More Perfect Union," promising "to accept nothing less than justice for every woman."³⁰⁶

In 1979, the Upstate New York Women's History Organization sponsored a conference on women's history in Seneca Falls. Projected attendance was one hundred; four hundred people actually came. Women and men in Seneca Falls created the Women's Hall of Fame (which later became the National Women's Hall of Fame). The Elizabeth Cady Stanton Foundation organized to purchase the Stanton house in Seneca Falls. On December 28, 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed legislation authorizing Women's Rights National Historical

³⁰⁶ *The Spirit of Houston: The First National Women's Conference* (Washington, D. C.: National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, 1978), 195, 138.

Park, whose mission was to preserve, protect, and interpret sites associated with the 1848 woman's rights convention.

Historical Writing: Political History, Women's Culture, and Social History

Much of the literature from the first wave of feminism had focused on political history, that is, the suffrage movement itself, told through biographies of suffrage leaders. Historical work from the second wave also dealt with women's political history. Much writing also, however, developed rapidly in two other areas: social history (exploring the nexus of race, class, and gender for ordinary women at a local level) and women's culture (looking at ways in which women related to each other, creating cultural values different from those of men). These three areas began to overlap in creative ways, informing new writing about Seneca Falls.

Political History

In terms of political history, historians had a special interest in the early woman's rights movement. They did look at Seneca Falls but only as part of the movement as a whole. One of the earliest (and still one of the most influential) studies to emerge from the second wave of feminism was Aileen Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890–1920* (1965). Kraditor focused on the period after 1890, arguing that suffragists shifted in those decades from arguments based on natural rights to those based on expediency. She began her work, however, with a direct reference to the Seneca Falls convention. "The woman suffrage movement," she argued, "was the child of the woman's rights movement," and, she noted,

[T]he origin of the woman's rights movement is commonly dated from 1848 when Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and a few others met in Seneca Falls, New York, and drew up the first public protest in America against women's political, economic, and social inferiority. This protest, modeled after the Declaration of Independence, was called the 'Declaration of Sentiments.'³⁰⁷

Miriam Gurko, *The Ladies of Seneca Falls: The Birth of the Woman's Rights Movement* (1974) used Seneca Falls in her title as a shorthand term to refer not specifically to the Seneca Falls convention but more broadly to the whole woman's rights movement. In 1975, Anne Scott and Andrew Scott published an excellent collection of documents relating to suffrage, *One Half the People*, still in print, with a fifty-page introduction, including a description of Seneca Falls as "the first convention" and a reprint of the Declaration of Sentiments.³⁰⁸

The most scholarly general survey of the early woman's rights movement after Eleanor Flexner was Keith Melder, *Beginnings of Sisterhood: The American Woman's Rights Movement, 1800–1850* (1977). Melder downplayed the importance of the Seneca Falls

³⁰⁷ Aileen Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890–1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 1.

³⁰⁸ Miriam Gurko, *The Ladies of Seneca Falls: The Birth of the Woman's Rights Movement* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974); Anne Scott and Andrew Scott, *One Half the People* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1975). Other overviews included Andrew Sinclair, *The Emancipation of the American Woman* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); William O'Neill, *The Woman Movement: Feminism in the United States and England*. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1969); William O'Neill, *Everyone Was Brave: A History of Feminism in America* (Chicago: Quandrangle, 1971), which emphasized the distinction between feminism (focused purely on woman's rights) and social feminism (which included a concern for working women and issues of class).

convention, arguing that “official historians of the suffrage movement give the Seneca Falls meeting an exaggerated role in establishing the woman’s movement” and declared that “in order to understand the significance of this early convention, it is important to comprehend its personal and social origins.” The Declaration of Sentiments, wrote Melder, “summarized grievances that had been building up for nearly half a century, announcing a war cry for embattled woman that echoed again and again in the long suffrage struggle.”³⁰⁹

The only new approach to Seneca Falls in this period, in terms of either method or sources, was by Ross Evans Paulson. In 1973, in *Women’s Suffrage and Prohibition: A Comparative Study of Equality and Social Control*, Paulson noted that the story of Seneca Falls “has taken on legendary dimensions,” but

the Seneca Falls legend obscures as much information as it reveals about the event by leading the reader’s attention away from significant aspects of the incident. For example, why were so many people in an out-of-the-way corner of upstate New York willing to drop everything on short notice at the sight of a terse announcement in a modest county newspaper and spend two days debating women’s rights? . . . Was there anything in the social and economic characteristics of the area that would account for the public response to the call for the convention?³¹⁰

Paulson’s approach was a radical shift in perspective from earlier studies. Rather than repeating Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s story, Paulson and his student, Katherine Milton Faust, used techniques and sources from the emerging field of social history to look at Seneca Falls from the angle of those who attended the convention. They developed a collective biography of the signers of the Declaration of Sentiments and concluded that “the Woman’s Rights movement at its roots does not seem to be a radicalism, but a liberal thrust from a relatively comfortable middle class tied to reform.” While French feminists wanted “an alternate economic and political system,” the American women wanted “not so much to change the system as to join it as full and equal partners with men.”³¹¹

There were problems with Paulson’s analysis: Seneca Falls was not an “out-of-the-way corner” of upstate New York. Instead, it was a small city located on major turnpike, canal, and rail lines from New York and Boston. “Liberal” and “radical” are debatable terms and need careful definition, as does “middle class” in this period. But Paulson’s comparative approach, his use of collective biography and social history techniques, and his attempt to study the signers of the Declaration of Sentiments in the context of larger theoretical issues were major new contributions.

The question of whether woman’s rights was a radical, liberal, or even conservative movement continued to challenge historians. Gerda Lerner, in an article in *American Scholar* in 1971, distinguished between woman’s rights (which she defined as civil rights, including voting, office holding, and property rights) and feminism (which she viewed as incorporating change in all social institutions). Lerner stood virtually alone in this distinction, however. Instead, most scholars used woman’s rights as a synonym for feminism, a word that entered the American vocabulary from French feminists in the early twentieth century. Woman’s

³⁰⁹ Keith Melder, E., *Beginnings of Sisterhood: The American Woman’s Rights Movement, 1800–1850* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 145, 147.

³¹⁰ Ross Evans Paulson, *Women’s Suffrage and Prohibition: A Comparative Study of Equality and Social Control* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman, 1973), 33–35.

³¹¹ Paulson, *Women’s Suffrage and Prohibition*, 36, 54.

rights encompassed the broad agenda proposed at Seneca Falls, in contrast to what was often perceived as the narrower emphasis on suffrage that succeeded it after the Civil War.³¹²

By the late nineteenth century, Seneca Falls had become identified in the minds of many Americans primarily with suffrage. Ellen Carol DuBois challenged the view that suffrage was a conservative stance. In a key 1975 article, "The Radicalism of the Woman Suffrage Movement: Notes toward the Reconstruction of Nineteenth-Century Feminism," DuBois argued that

Nineteenth-century feminists and antifeminists alike perceived the demand for the vote as the most radical element in women's protest against their oppression. . . . [T]he significance of the woman suffrage movement rested precisely on the fact that it bypassed woman's oppression within the family, or private sphere, and demanded instead her admission to citizenship, and through it admission to the public arena. . . . For women, the emergence of a public sphere held out the revolutionary possibility of a new way to relate to society not defined by their subordinate position within the family. . . . Because enfranchisement involved a way for women to relate to society independent of their familial relations, it was the key demand of nineteenth-century feminists. It was the cornerstone of a social movement that did not simply catalog and protest women's wrongs in the existing sexual order but also revealed the possibility of an alternate sexual order.³¹³

DuBois developed these arguments in her classic *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* (1978). "This book," she wrote, "is a study of the origins of the first feminist movement in the United States, the nineteenth-century woman suffrage movement. For three-quarters of a century, beginning in 1848, American women centered their aspirations for freedom and power on the demand for the vote." Before Seneca Falls, she argued, "women's discontent remained unexamined, implicit, and above all, disorganized. . . . The women's rights movement crystallized these sentiments into a feminist politics . . . [and] began a new phase in the history of feminism." The movement had two sources: "women's growing awareness of their common conditions and grievances" and antislavery politics. DuBois characterized the 1848 Seneca Falls convention as "the first episode of the women's rights movement" and asserted that "their Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions anticipated every demand of nineteenth-century feminism."³¹⁴

While most studies of suffrage dealt with women's groups organized separately from "regular" politics, DuBois treated the suffrage movement as part of the political mainstream. Instead of ending her study with the Civil War, DuBois followed the story from 1848 to 1870, a trajectory that later scholars have also used as most appropriate for understanding the dynamics of the woman suffrage movement. The mid-1870s, rather than the Civil War, formed a tapering off of the early phase of the movement. By the late 1870s, woman suffragists began to expand their base, develop arguments based on expediency rather than natural rights, highlight the differences rather than the similarities between women and men,

³¹² Gerda Lerner, "Women's Rights and American Feminism," *American Scholar* 40, no. 2 (1971): 235-48.

³¹³ Ellen Carol DuBois, "The Radicalism of the Woman Suffrage Movement: Notes toward the Reconstruction of Nineteenth-Century Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 3 {{add no.??}} (1975), reprinted in DuBois, ed., *Woman Suffrage & Women's Rights*, 30-42.

³¹⁴ Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1978), 21-23.

and focus formal movement activities on suffrage, excluding the broader aims of the earlier movement.

In *A Time of Protest: Suffragists Challenge the Republic, 1870–1887*, Sally Roesch Wagner highlighted the 1876 celebration of the nation's centennial as the high-water mark of the success of woman's rights advocates in promoting natural rights arguments. On July 4, 1876, Susan B. Anthony, Matilda Joslyn Gage, and three other women from the National Woman Suffrage Association submitted a "Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States" to the vice president of the United States at the official centennial celebration in Philadelphia. Reminiscent of the Declaration of Sentiments at Seneca Falls, this new declaration argued that "the history of our country in the past hundred years, has been a series of assumptions and usurpations of power over woman, in direct opposition to the principles of just government." These principles included "the natural rights of each individual" and "the exact equality of these rights." Instead, they insisted, "we ask justice, we ask equality, we ask that all the civil and political rights that belong to citizens of the United States, be guaranteed to us and our daughters forever."³¹⁵

Women's Culture

In contrast to those who focused on women and politics, especially the suffrage movement, another group of historians began to study ordinary women using literary sources, including printed materials and letters. While these historians did not deal directly with Seneca Falls, their approach provided an important context for understanding the causes of the woman's rights movement, the audience to which woman's rights advocates appealed, and the ability of woman's rights advocates to be so effective over such a long period of time.

From about 1965 to 1980, a general consensus dominated the literature, that the colonial period had been a "golden age" of general respect and power for women, and that urbanization and industrialization in the first half of the nineteenth century led to a decline in women's position (at least for middle-class women). Women became confined to the home while men found new opportunities and challenges in the public world. As Kathleen Brown summed up this literature, "Colonial women's history . . . served as a baseline for measuring the declension of women's status in the nineteenth century."³¹⁶

Some historians argued, in contrast to Mary Beard's earlier emphasis on "woman as force in history," that so clearly were sex roles in the nineteenth century delineated into a private world for women and a public world for men, they could be described as "separate spheres." In 1966, one of the most influential articles ever published in women's history appeared in the *American Quarterly*: Barbara Welter's "Cult of True Womanhood." In this work, Welter analyzed articles in women's magazines of the era, concluding that four qualities characterized a "true woman": piety, purity, submission, and domesticity. In a rapidly changing world, men found opportunities (and temptations) outside the home. Women were held "hostage in the home" to maintain and pass on to the "rising generation" republican precepts and Christian virtues such as cooperation rather than competition, and working for the good of the whole community rather than for personal gain. Women in the emerging urban middle class, the prime audience for such articles, were bombarded with images that promoted these ideals. In 2002, the *Journal of Women's History* published a

³¹⁵ Sally Roesch Wagner, *A Time of Protest: Suffragists Challenge the Republic, 1870–1887* (Sacramento: Spectrum Publications, 1987); Gordon, ed., *Selected Papers*, vol. 3.

³¹⁶ Kathleen M. Brown, "Brave New Worlds: Women's and Gender History," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd. ser. 50, no. 2 (April 1993): 311–28.

retrospective analysis of Welter's article, citing its importance as perhaps the most frequently cited article in all of women's history.³¹⁷

Other scholars had different names for Welter's cult of true womanhood. Keith Melder called it the "ideology of woman's appropriate sphere" (1977). Barbara Berg referred to it as "the woman-belle ideal" (1978). However described, separate spheres kept women out of emerging opportunities for education, jobs, and political power in the public world of the new republic.³¹⁸

But separate spheres had another, perhaps unintended, result. They gave women strength, as women created distinct organizations, based on their own values. Even if men dominated in the public sphere, women created their own bases of power in their own spaces. The concept of women's culture—based on values and activities that women shared in their real lives, as opposed to those they were supposed to share—came to dominate much historical discussion. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's article "The Female World of Love and Ritual," based on a survey of correspondence among thirty-five families of white women between about 1760 and 1880, argued that women created powerful bonds among themselves, based on ties of family and friendship, with norms different from those of the hegemonic male cultures around them. So powerful and long-lasting were these female bonds that Smith-Rosenberg labeled them "homosocial networks." A twenty-five year retrospective on this article, published in the *Journal of Women's History* in 2000, called it "the most cited article on women's relationships."³¹⁹

The idea of separate spheres and bonds among women became a powerful energizing focus for many studies of women's history, and historians began to explore this theme in sophisticated ways. In particular, they began to delineate ways in which separate spheres provided both the basis for women's oppression and a platform for social change. In *Bonds of Womanhood* (1977), Nancy Cott argued that, by sharing work roles, women in New England created a solidarity akin to sisterhood and laid the basis for a woman's rights movement. Women's work in schools, churches, and separate women's organizations was key to understanding changes in their roles. Ann Douglas discussed the "feminization of religion," while Katherine Kish Sklar explored Catherine Beecher's use of the ideal of separate spheres to promote women's roles as teachers. Keith Melder emphasized this theme in a 1967 article, "Ladies Bountiful: Organized Women's Benevolence in 19th Century America," in which he argued that women's benevolent institutions formed one basis for the later woman's rights movement. In "Beauty, the Beast and the Militant Woman: A Case Study in Sex Roles and Social Stress in Jacksonian America" (1971), Carroll Smith-Rosenberg focused on the New York Moral Reform Society, Smith-Rosenberg argued that women used this group to assert their rights to control men's behavior, often in very public ways, specifically confronting the sexual double standard, as they tried to protect young women from prostitution. As Glenda Riley noted, the view of women as "moral guardians" eroded stereotypes of women as passive. Through writers such as Sarah Josepha Hale (editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*) and

³¹⁷ "Women's History in the New Millennium: A Retrospective Analysis of Barbara Welter's 'The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820–1860,'" *Journal of Women's History* 14, no. 1 (2002): 149.

³¹⁸ Keith Melder, *Beginnings of Sisterhood* (1977); Barbara Berg, *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism, The Woman and the City, 1800–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

³¹⁹ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1 (1975): 1–29. For a review of the impact of Smith-Rosenberg's article in the last twenty-five years, see Molly McGarry et al., "Women's History in the New Millennium: Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's 'The Female World of Love and Ritual' after Twenty-Five Years," *Journal of Women's History* 12, no. 3 (2000): 8–38.

E.D.E.N. Southworth, women began to realize their value as guardians of virtue. Such networks, some historians argued, became one basis for an organized woman's rights movement. Estelle Freedman's 1979 article, "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870–1930," emphasized a similar pattern later in the century, as women worked in the public sphere, bridging dichotomies between men and women, public and private.³²⁰

Some historians argued that a similar dynamic occurred within families. Daniel Scott Smith, challenging the idea that nineteenth-century women had failed to confront their oppression as wives, argued instead for what he labeled "domestic feminism," that is, the rising status of women within their families, as they took control of their own bodies and limited family size. Later in the century, women used their roles as mothers or potential mothers to argue that women should be "civic housekeepers." As Linda Kerber has argued, this idea became the basis for much of Progressive reform.³²¹

Social History

More detailed studies—of individuals, communities, events, and periods—refined and in many cases disrupted these broad outlines. Historians became much more sophisticated in their understanding that women, who make up more than half of most populations, are by their very nature defined powerfully by identities other than sex/gender. Chief among these are race/ethnicity and class.

While some scholars were exploring the development of woman's rights from a political angle and others were elaborating the idea of separate spheres and woman's culture, still others—influenced by the dominance of social history in the historical profession as a whole—began to study women's history as part of social and community history ("history from the bottom up," in Jesse Lemisch's famous phrase), exploring what some called the holy trinity of race, gender, and class.³²²

These historians began to emphasize the diversity of lived experience. They realized that the ideology of separate spheres was prescriptive, not descriptive, and that the lives of real women (and men) had to be studied quite apart from the normative literature. In particular, historians began to emphasize race/ethnicity, class, religion, and rural/urban distinctions as major social characteristics that affected men's and women's roles.

In 1969, Gerda Lerner set the stage for this new phase of studying women's history by suggesting a conceptual model that incorporated a sociological and psychological perspective of history, recognizing that social expectations were not the same as social realities. Viewing women as an oppressed group, she noted, historians had focused on the

³²⁰ Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780–1835* (New Haven, 1977); Ann Douglas, *Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977); Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973); Keith Melder, "Ladies Bountiful: Organized Women's Benevolence in 19th Century America," *New York History* 48, 3 (1967): 231–254; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Beauty, the Beast and the Militant Woman: A Case Study in Sex Roles and Social Stress in Jacksonian America" (1971); Estelle Freedman, "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870–1930," *Feminist Studies* 5 (1979): 512–29.

³²¹ Daniel Scott Smith, "Family Limitation, Sexual Control and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America," *Feminist Studies* 1, no. 3–4 (1973): 40–57; Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sherron De Hart, eds., *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 263–266.

³²² Jesse Lemisch, "The American Revolution Seen from the Bottom Up," in Barton Bernstein, ed., *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

struggle for equal rights, especially for suffrage. In Lerner's opinion, that view was too middle class and nativist to be useful in the late twentieth century. Now, argued Lerner, historians needed a wider framework, one that encompassed differences of race and class. Lerner contributed to this wider understanding with publication in 1972 of her edited collection, *Black Women in America*, a selection of writings by African American women that is still in print and useful.³²³

William Chafe, *Women and Equality: Changing Patterns in American Culture* (1977), noted that, on the one hand, women are a "homogeneous, self-defined, and coherent group within the larger society." On the other hand, they have "differential experiences . . . in material conditions of life, and in group orientation according to class, race, and ethnicity," and they live "in nearly constant contact with men." In Chafe's view, to assume that a colonial golden age was followed by a declining status for women in the nineteenth century is not appropriate without asking another question: A golden age for which women?³²⁴

Studies of ethnic women, working-class women, and women in slavery began to proliferate in the 1970s and continued through the 1990s. Examples include works by Thomas Dublin on women in the Lowell mills; Mary Blewett on women and the shoe industry in Lynn, Massachusetts; and Deborah Gray White and Dorothy Sterling on African American women. While these studies did not explicitly deal with Seneca Falls, they did provide a context (and often suggested perspectives and methodologies) for a new approach to Seneca Falls based on social and community history.³²⁵

Seneca Falls in the Context of Women's History: 1980–1995

Background

Historiography surrounding Seneca Falls by the late 1970s dealt with political history, women's culture, and social history. Few historians, however, with the exception of Ross Evans Paulson, had studied the Seneca Falls convention itself from any perspective except that of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, as reflected in the work of Alma Lutz and Eleanor Flexner.

By the 1970s, historians generally accepted one basic paradigm to explain the development of the early woman's rights movement (and the background to the Seneca Falls convention): the organizing of women (particularly urban middle-class women) in the public sphere for religion, benevolent reform, and education in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century provided an essential base that supported more radical reform activities in the 1830s (including temperance, moral reform, and abolitionism). Women's experience in the militant abolitionist movement in the 1830s and 1840s provided the touchstone to channel an unfocused protofeminist consciousness into organized action and creating the

³²³ Gerda Lerner, "New Approaches to the Study of Women in American History," *Journal of Social History* 3, 1 (1969): 53–62; Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972. Reprint 1992).

³²⁴ William Chafe, in *Women and Equality: Changing Patterns in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 174, 176.

³²⁵ Thomas Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work: New England Lives in the Industrial Revolution* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994); Mary Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780–1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Deborah Gray White, *A'rn't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, rev. ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999); Dorothy Sterling, ed., *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984).

beginnings of the woman's rights movement in the 1840s. In this version, Seneca Falls was the direct and almost inevitable result of this rising tide of resistance to the repressive "woman's sphere" of early nineteenth-century America.

As historians in the 1980s and 1990s began to look again at the Seneca Falls convention, they turned to the new microfilm edition of the Stanton-Anthony Papers, edited by Pat Holland and Ann Gordon. They also incorporated a new look at manuscript sources from other signers of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments (including Martha Wright, Amy Post, and Frederick Douglass). And they began to use techniques and sources derived from social and community history.

New research challenged the neat progression of the old paradigm in several ways. It suggested that some of the most radical woman's rights advocates came from rural not urban areas, that cultural background (especially religious background) was more important than class in explaining woman's rights commitment, that woman's rights ideas often predated abolitionist activities, and that, far from a progression that led from benevolent reform through temperance and abolitionism to woman's rights, groups that supported benevolent reforms often balked at joining movements such as abolitionism and woman's rights.

Historians in the late twentieth century worked in the context of increasing public attention to historic sites relating to the Seneca Falls convention. Women's Rights National Historical Park, signed into law by President Carter on December 28, 1980, officially opened in July 1982. Under Superintendent Judy Hart, scholars (including Gerda Lerner, first woman president of the Organization of American Historians,) joined Rhoda Barney Jenkins, Elizabeth Cady Stanton's great-great-granddaughter, in Seneca Falls to help celebrate this event. Gerda Lerner appointed Judith Wellman, historian of Woman's Rights National Historical Park, as chair of the OAH Committee on the Status of Women. The committee's theme that year was "Women and Public History," and the committee focused its program for the OAH annual meeting on Seneca Falls, with a program of African American music and a joint reading of the Declaration of Independence and the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments by historians Carl Degler and Mary Kay Tachau.³²⁶

Separate Spheres:

Critiques from Political History, Social History, Anthropology, and Postmodern Theory

Historical research on Seneca Falls in the late twentieth century emerged in the context of critical reflections on women and political history, women's culture, and social history of the previous decade. In a forum printed in *Feminist Studies* in 1980, Ellen Carol DuBois summed up results of research in the 1970s, suggesting that historians had found evidences of women's awareness of their own oppression not simply in the woman's rights movement but in many aspects of their lives, including

in the labor movement, the birth control movement, the Socialist party, temperance, and abolitionism. Even more broadly, they have found evidences of protest against male domination and affirmation of sisterhood in domestic novels, benevolent organizations, [and] female friendships, which suggest a very widespread, largely inchoate feminist consciousness among nineteenth-century women. These discoveries greatly strengthen the

³²⁶ For a discussion of alliances between various groups, including historians, that created Woman's Rights National Historical Park, see Judith Wellman, "It's a Wide Community Indeed: Alliances and Issues in Creating Women's Rights National Historical Park, Seneca Falls, New York," in *Restoring Women's History through Historic Preservation*, eds. Gail Dubrow and Jennifer Goodman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

feminist conception of women's history, which is that the oppression of women and their effort to understand and overcome it are central themes of women's experience.³²⁷

Reacting to the emphasis on women's culture, DuBois argued for a renewed understanding of the importance of women's political history. Historians had looked at women's culture in isolation, she suggested, without relating it either to the dominant male culture or the emerging woman's rights movement. In fact, "women's rights feminism grew out of a critique of what we are calling women's culture." DuBois continued, "Contemporary historians must not let questions of culture lead them to forget the political origins of women's history itself, in a movement for social change," and she declared, "[I]t may be time to return to the study of politics from the more sophisticated perspective which the study of culture has afforded us."³²⁸

Social historians also criticized the use of women's culture as the overriding theme of women's history. As they studied women outside the emerging European American urban middle classes (including white working-class women, African American women, Native American women, Hispanic women, and rural European American women), they found very different patterns of social organization.

Separate spheres were once assumed to be universal, based on a universal patriarchal system. Over time, however, scholars began to recognize both the limits of the idea of separate spheres as well as its usefulness in specific situations. This model did not fit working-class cultures, American societies, or for many rural cultures. Finally, scholars increasingly criticized its use even for white middle-class urban women. The idea of bonds among women took on much more convoluted forms as scholars realized that such bonds could become a source of conflict as well as cooperation.

In 1985, Nancy Hewitt summed up these critiques in an influential article, "Beyond the Search for Sisterhood: American Women's History in the 1980s," that first appeared in *Social History*.³²⁹ "The true woman/separate spheres/woman's culture triad became the most widely used framework for interpreting women's past in the United States," noted Hewitt. But sisterly bonds generally divided women along lines of race and class. Women in slavery as well as working-class white women forged bonds of sisterhood based on their work experience that transcended their family lives and united them in common interests with men in a public world. "The very tightness of the web thus formed," argued Hewitt, "often served as a wall against women of other social, economic, ethnic, or racial groups." Similarly, middle-class women had differing interests among themselves, based not on gender but on economic and social ties. And when middle-class white women tried to aid women of other classes and ethnic groups, they usually did so on their own terms. In short, concluded Hewitt,

[H]istorians have focused on the parallels in the establishment of women's spheres across classes, races, and ethnic groups and have asserted certain commonalities among them. . . . A closer examination now reveals that no such universal sisterhood existed, and in fact that the

³²⁷ Ellen Carol DuBois, "Politics and Culture in Women's History," *Feminist Studies* 6, no. 1 (1980), reprinted in *Woman Suffrage & Women's Rights*, 43–53.

³²⁸ DuBois, "Politics and Culture," in *Woman Suffrage & Women's Rights*, 46, 49.

³²⁹ Nancy Hewitt, "Beyond the Search for Sisterhood: American Women's History in the 1980s," *Social History* 10 (October 1985), reprinted in Ellen Carol DuBois and Vicki L. Ruiz, eds., *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 1–14.

development of a sense of community among various classes of women served as a barrier to an all-embracing bond of womanhood.³³⁰

Of particular interest to Seneca Falls are critiques of the separate spheres/woman's culture theme based on studies of rural women. While many signers of the Declaration of Sentiments lived in 1848 in villages or cities, most had been raised in rural areas, as Nancy Hewitt has argued, and their adult lives reflected rural values.³³¹

Historians who studied rural women found that, like many signers of Seneca Falls (such as the members of the M'Clintock family) rural women and men often worked in gender-specific groups, but they were also bound together in male-female networks. As Nancy Grey Osterud found in her 1991 study of New York farm women, for example, "the strategies that rural women adopted, like the problems they confronted, were the inverse of those followed by urban middle-class women. Defined in relation to men rather than as distinct from them, rural women tried to transform the bonds of kinship and labor into sources of sharing and strength, renegotiating the terms of gender relations and modifying them in a more symmetrical and egalitarian direction." She concluded, "Instead of elaborating a distinct women's culture, rural women nurtured respect and reciprocity between women and men in their families and kin groups."³³²

Finally, the separate spheres model did not always work well even for urban middle-class women. In *The Cradle of the Middle-Class* (1982), Mary Ryan argued that, in the early years of industrialization, women and men in middle-class families in Oneida County, New York, worked together to devise family strategies for achieving material goals, strategies that included sobriety and honesty. Even in fiction written for the urban middle class, the same sources that Barbara Welter had originally studied, "obedient and dependent women were not the ideal." As Mary Kelley suggested in 2001, "[I]n revisiting Barbara Welter's influential paradigm . . . we learn that True Womanhood's impact, which was presumed to have been uniform and transparent, was instead as diverse and complicated as the lives of those for whom the ideology had been designed. . . . little if any of Welter's 'Cult of True Womanhood' remains intact."³³³

³³⁰ Hewitt, "Beyond the Search for Sisterhood," in Dubois and Ruiz, *Unequal Sisters*, 2-3, 7-9.

³³¹ Nancy Hewitt, "Feminist Friends: Agrarian Quakers and the Emergence of Woman's Rights in America," *Feminist Studies* 12, no. 1 (1986): 27-50.

³³² Nancy Grey Osterud, *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), 2, 9, 11; John Mack Faragher noted that "the cultural expectation was that husbands and wives, despite their differences, would reach some order and harmony within the bonds of marriage." John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1979), 2. Joan M. Jensen studied Quaker farm women in the Philadelphia hinterland. Focusing on three spheres—the family, domestic production, and the public world—she concluded that women "did not emerge free and equal, but they emerged freer and more equal into a society that would try their skills and challenge their ambitions. Because these women worked in three spheres, their culture became rich, dense, and intricate. It bound them to husband, children, neighbor, market, and to other women. But the changing culture also loosened those bonds."; Joan M. Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750-1850* ((New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1986), xv.

³³³ Linda K. Kerber, "Separate 'Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *Journal of American History* (1998): 9-39; Nancy Hewitt, "Beyond the Search for Sisterhood: American Women's History in the 1980s," *Social History* [Great Britain] 10, no. 3 (1985) 299-321; Mary Kelley, Julie Roy Jeffrey, Laura McCall, and Carol Lasser, *Journal of the Early Republic* 21, no. 1 (Spring

In *Women's Activism and Social Change, Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (1984), Nancy Hewitt showed how the separate spheres model most certainly did not work for reform women. Three competing groups of reform women in Rochester created alliances with men in their own economic and social circles that excluded women and men in competing circles. While all these women were white, Protestant, and middle class, none of them followed a straight path "from benevolent reform through evangelicalism and abolition to woman's rights." Instead, women in each group were "separated from each other more rigidly than distinctions in spheres separated them from male kith and kin."³³⁴

In this way, women and men at Seneca Falls differed significantly from both the separate spheres model and the model of groups divided by economic and social distinctions. Women and men at Seneca Falls claimed to speak on behalf of universal womanhood. Although the leaders were all European Americans, abolitionists, mostly Quakers, and had good incomes, the signers as a whole did, in fact, reflect a wide variety of ethnic groups (all white, except for Frederick Douglass), a wide class spectrum, and—within the Protestant spectrum—a wide variety of cultural backgrounds, as defined by religion and place of origin.

Despite criticisms of the separate spheres model, it continued to attract considerable scholarly attention, as historians and theorists looked at the idea of women's subordination in different cultures over time. In *Creation of Patriarchy* (1986), Gerda Lerner argued that patriarchal societies were not innate to the human condition but arose historically with the development of agriculture. The enslavement of women from enemy groups, she suggested, formed the model for all enslavement. More recently, Robert McElvaine, in *Eve's Seed*, surveyed gender relations from prehistory to the present and characterized the nineteenth-century United States as a period of "sexual bi-polar disorder," so radical was the separation of "the masculine world of business and politics from the feminine domesticity."³³⁵

While some scholars continued to emphasize the usefulness of the idea of separate spheres, others questioned this dichotomy, emphasizing a more complex understanding of sexual difference. Sex, they realized, might not have the same meaning to one group of people as it did to another. Difference did not necessarily mean that one group dominated another. Physical separation did not mean subordination. Even in hierarchical situations, those individuals in submissive positions had negotiating power. Using religious and cultural variables, anthropologist Peggy Reeves Sanday studied gender roles in cultures around the world and concluded that, while most cultures were male dominated, a significant proportion showed evidence of sexual equality. Although Sanday did not make this connection, we can suggest that Quakers who participated in the Seneca Falls convention were one example of these egalitarian cultures.³³⁶

Helping us to understand why the signers of Seneca Falls took an action that they and others considered radical is the understanding, emphasized by many scholars in the late

2001): 115-23; Mary Ryan, *The Cradle of the Middle-Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1780-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

³³⁴ Nancy Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change, Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984), 22-23.

³³⁵ Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Robert S. McElvaine, *Eve's Seed: Biology, the Sexes, and the Course of History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 240. See also Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, "Women, Culture, and Society: A Theoretical Overview," in *Women, Culture, and Society*, eds, Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (1975); Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Female Power and Male Dominance: On the Origins of Sexual Inequality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

³³⁶ Sanday, *Female Power and Male Dominance*.

nineteenth century, that “truth” is not monolithic but that people construct knowledge and understand themselves, each other (and the past) in different ways. Postmodernism, deconstruction, or post-structuralism, emerging from literary theory, promoted this perspective. Postmodernists focused not on discovering the truth of the past (which, they claimed, was not knowable) but on understanding the ways that people constructed knowledge.

Reflecting the broader intellectual context of postmodernism, gender became a widely used term, implying that sexual differences had a variety of possible meanings and opening a multiplicity of perspectives. As Carol Lasser suggested in 2001, “[W]e begin to understand gender as an unstable, vital, and fluid relation, not as the enclosed space that has imprisoned our thinking.”³³⁷

Influenced by postmodern theorists, specific discussions of the “essentialism” of women emerged in the literature in the late 1970s, beginning with William Chafe. This discussion reached a crescendo with postmodern historians such as Joan Scott, who published *Gender and the Politics of History* in 1983, shortly after Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* first appeared in English translation. “Gender in these essays,” explained Scott,

means knowledge about sexual difference. I use knowledge, following Michel Foucault, to mean the understanding produced by cultures and societies of human relationships, in this case of those between men and women. Such knowledge is not absolute or true, but always relative. . . . Gender is the social organization of sexual difference.³³⁸

At its most extreme, the question challenged the very premise of women’s history: Could we, in fact, study women as a group at all, if women were so diverse that generalizations were not possible?

Scholars confronted what woman’s rights activists had already debated: Were women a group, distinctly different from men? In some form or another the question ran like a thread not only through women’s history but also through the whole woman’s rights movement, from Seneca Falls forward. At Seneca Falls, for example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton had insisted that women act as a group on their own behalf. Lucretia Mott had urged unified effort with men. The compromise at Seneca Falls had been to allow men to sign the Declaration of Sentiments in a separate column.

In 1990, Joan Scott and Linda Gordon debated these issues squarely. Manuela Thurner’s summary of their exchange came down to a series of key questions:

Is all history only text, discourse, and representation, or can historians get at the materiality of the past, a “reality behind language,” in order to record the experiences and activities of men and women? Is individual or collective action based in concrete, material experiences or is it, according to Scott, purely a “discursive effect”? Does the emphasis on language and discourse deflect attention from issues of power, oppression, and discrimination or is discourse the central, maybe even the only, area through which struggles for power are articulated and consequently the arena in which those struggles need to be fought? Is it

³³⁷ Carol Lasser, “Beyond Separate Spheres: The Power of Public Opinion,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 115–123. As Joan Scott has suggested, however, current usage of the word “gender” often reflect what people used to mean by “sex.” In many ways, “gender” has lost its power to destabilize accepted wisdom about sex roles. Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), xii.

³³⁸ Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 2.

sufficient to define gender as a metaphor of sexual difference if it needs to be understood as a system or structure of oppression?³³⁹

Many historians found a postmodern approach untenable. In a 1994 article titled "Gender as a Postmodern Category of Paralysis," Joan Hoff argued that theories developed by male poststructuralists such as Michel Foucault were "hostile to half the human population, a male-defined definition of gender that erased woman as a category of analysis." Further, Hoff claimed, post-structuralism "denies retrievable historical 'reality.'"³⁴⁰

In 1996, physicist Alan Sokal published "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity" in *Social Text*. Sokal's essay was a hoax, a parody intended to expose postmodern scholarship as essentially jargon filled and unintelligible. Historians Ruth Rosen and Barbara Epstein defended Sokal, attacking poststructuralism for

undermining social analysis, replacing concern for social change with concern for intellectual and aesthetic sophistication. . . . The principles that dominate radical poststructuralism, including anti-essentialism, the rejection of metanarratives, the insistence that everything must be understood as socially constructed, the rejection of claims of truth or value, are exaggerated versions of one-sided, partial insights.³⁴¹

Yet, by moving beyond women to look at ways in which all human organizations reflect gendered assumptions, gender history has opened up new areas of study of men's history. It has also proven especially useful in gay and lesbian history, in which deconstructing identities has been the very basis of much recent work in this field. One result of these ideas has been to splinter the old trinity of race, class, and gender into what Nancy Hewitt has called, in an incomplete listing, the "race/class/sex/sexual/regional/generational/national/religious subgroup" model.³⁴²

Manuela Thurner concluded in a 1997 essay on theories in women's history that two possibilities exist. One possibility is "to interrogate critically the concept of difference and to pay attention to the various forms of oppression and discrimination is . . . to take a broad view and to attempt a grand narrative," as Gerda Lerner did in *Creation of Patriarchy*, in which she charted the ways in which "difference" became the foundation for "dominance" in various parts of the world at various times. Another option, suggested Thurner, would be, as Jacqueline Dowd Hall suggested, to reject such a grand metanarrative in favor of multiple voices. "Rather than seeking some new 'centered structure,' Dowd Hall argued, "I would call

³³⁹ Joan Scott and Linda Gordon, *Signs* 15, no. 1 (1990): 848–60, summarized in Manuela Thurner, "Subject to Change: Theories and Paradigms of U.S. Feminist History," *Journal of Women's History* 9, no. 2 (1997): 122–47.

³⁴⁰ Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*; Joan Hoff, "Gender as a Postmodern Category of Paralysis," *Women's History Review* [Great Britain] 3, no. 2 (1994): 149–68.

³⁴¹ Barbara Epstein, "Why Poststructuralism Is a Dead End for Progressive Thought," *Socialist Review* 25, no. 2 (1995): 83–199, quoted in Lisa Duggan, "The Theory Wars, or, Who's Afraid of Judith Butler?" *Journal of Women's History* 10, no. 1 (1998): 9–20.

³⁴² Nancy Cott, "On Men's History and Women's History," in *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America*, ed. Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 205–11; Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: Plume Books, 1990); Nancy A. Hewitt, "Compounding Differences," *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 2 (1992): 313–26.

for an historical practice that turns on partiality, that is self-conscious about perspective, that releases multiple voices rather than competing orthodoxies, and that, above all, nurtures an 'internally differing but united political community.'"³⁴³

Dowd Hall's ideas mirrored those of Elsa Barkley Brown. Thurner summarized Barkley Brown's views:

[A] historian's ambition should be neither to establish herself at the center nor to negotiate a standpoint outside of or marginal to the reigning orthodoxies. Historians should be able "to pivot the center," i.e., to assume different standpoints and to acknowledge them to be the center and starting points for their observations and interpretations. In contrast to linear, logical, well-ordered Western epistemology, Elsa Barkley Brown calls this method nonlinear and polyrhythmic. For her, history is not a clearly and orderly structured textile, a classical concert, or an isolated monologue that requires an awestruck, passive audience; rather, it is comparable to a quilt, jazz, or "gumbo ya ya," a Creole expression for the simultaneous talking of various people. According to Brown, history deals with structures, rhythms, and voices, which only in their synchronous interplay make for a more complete and complex picture of the past.³⁴⁴

Instead of dichotomies, these historians saw a complex interweaving of threads, an intersecting of a wide variety of relationships, with multiple layers of meaning. As seekers of the past, they placed themselves in this matrix, understanding that what they saw reflected their own perspective as well as the situation of those they studied. They understood the past not only for what it meant to those who lived it but also for what it means to people in the present.

Postmodern ideas were not applied directly to Seneca Falls in the 1990s, but the concepts of gender as socially organized sexual difference (promoting an exploration of varieties of sexual ideas and expressions) and the tension between metanarrative and multiple voices (suggesting ways to look at Seneca Falls and the emerging woman's movement from many different centers) offer fruitful possibilities for future work.

In the 1990s, German theorist Jurgen Habermas also began to influence a few historians of women, including Mary Ryan, whose *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City During the Nineteenth Century* appeared in 1997. Habermas looked at the way in which dialogue in the public sphere helped reshape social structures, particularly the ways in which women used public discourse to contest gender hierarchy and develop a new consciousness of their own situation. Glenna Mathews, in *The Rise of Public Woman: Woman's Power and Woman's Place in the United States, 1630–1970* (1992), also reflected this perspective. This emphasis on women's public roles may also be a fruitful area for further exploration, in terms of the history of Seneca Falls and the early woman's rights movement.³⁴⁵

³⁴³ Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy*; Jacqueline Dowd Hall, "Partial Truths," *Signs* 14, no. 4 (1989): 902–11, quoted in Thurner, "Subject to Change," 122–47.

³⁴⁴ Elsa Barkley Brown, "'What Has Happened Here': The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Feminist Politics," *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 2 (1992): 295–312, quoted in Thurner, "Subject to Change," 122–47.

³⁴⁵ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989); *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998); *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction: Preliminary Studies in the Theory of Communicative Action* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001); Mary P. Ryan, "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-Century America," *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1992); Joan Landes,

Women's Movement, 1820–1876

In the 1980s, historians continued to study the early woman's rights movement. The Seneca Falls convention became best-known to many Americans for its call for woman's suffrage, but second- and third-wave scholarship in women's history led to new considerations (and frequently dramatically new interpretations) of old questions, as well: What was the relationship between women and abolitionism? How did questions of race inform the early woman's rights movement? How did political abolitionists, including the Liberty Party and the new Republican Party, relate to the woman's rights movement? What is the most useful definition of politics, when we include women as well as men? What was the impact of legal reform on the woman's rights movement? Did women indeed have citizenship rights under the United States Constitution? Ironically, while these questions are important for our understanding of the context and meaning of the Seneca Falls convention, historians—focusing on issues of gender and culture, race and politics—largely neglected serious consideration of Seneca Falls itself.

Woman's Rights and Abolitionism

It has been a truism of woman's rights history from the nineteenth century to the present that abolitionism nurtured ideologies, tactics, and leaders for the woman's rights movement. Historians in the late twentieth century explored this connection in detail. In the 1970s, Ira Brown looked at women involved in antislavery activities in Philadelphia and New York City, including the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society and the antislavery conventions of American women (1837–39), as crucibles of the woman's rights movement. The World Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840, which both Mott and Stanton identified as a key precursor to Seneca Falls, received intense scrutiny from Clare Taylor (1974), Kathryn Kish Sklar (1990), Clare Midgley (1992), and Karen I. Halbersleben (1993).³⁴⁶

Women in western New York were early participants in abolitionist organizing, nationally, regionally, and locally. Signers of the Declaration of Sentiments included Quaker women abolitionists in Waterloo, Rochester, and Farmington/Macedon, as well as women from Seneca Falls whose husbands, fathers, and sons were active in the Liberty Party and

ed., *Feminism, the Public, and the Private* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Johann Meehan, ed., *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Sandra F. Van Burkleo, *"Belong to the World": Women's Rights and American Constitutional Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), argued that, as women find their public voices and break their silences, they move beyond boundaries and challenge the suppression of their voices. Mary Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City During the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997); Glenna Mathews, *The Rise of Public Woman: Woman's Power and Woman's Place in the United States, 1630–1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

³⁴⁶ Ira Berlin, "Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?" The Anti-Slavery Conventions of American Women, 1837–1839," *Pennsylvania History* 50 (1983), and "Cradle of Feminism: The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, 1833–1840," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 103 (1978); Clare Taylor, comp., *British and American Abolitionists: An Episode in Transatlantic Understanding* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1974); Kathryn Kish Sklar, "Women Who Speak for an Entire Nation": American and British Women Compared at the World Anti-Slavery Convention, London, 1840," *Pacific Historical Review* 59, no. 4 (1990); Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780–1870* (London: Routledge, 1992); Karen I. Halbersleben, *Women's Participation in the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1824–1865* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellon, 1993).

Susan Zaeske explored the importance of women and antislavery petitions in *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, and Women's Political Identity* (2003). In *The Devotion of These Women: Rhode Island in the Antislavery Network* (2002), Deborah Van Broekhoven explored women's petitioning, fund-raising, and educational efforts in Rhode Island, creating a rich understanding of how women at a grassroots level reflected egalitarian ideals and learned how to organize an effective movement through their antislavery work. Incorporating a discussion of women in Waterloo, Judith Wellman studied antislavery women in upstate New York in "Women and Radical Reform in Antebellum Upstate New York: A Profile of Grass Roots Female Abolitionists" (1980). Jean Fagan Yellin, *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* (1989), explored the relationship between sex and race through the slogan "Am I Not a Woman and a Sister," an image used by Seneca Falls signer Amy Post and others on their stationery. Yellin analyzed the limits to analogies between slavery and the oppression of white women.³⁴⁷

After the Civil War, many woman's rights advocates became supporters both of the Freedmen's Bureau and the National Woman Suffrage Association. Carol Faulkner followed the careers of antebellum antislavery and woman's rights advocates, including Emily Howland (Quaker from Sherwood, New York), Sojourner Truth, and Julia Griffiths, into the 1860s with her discussion of the Freedmen's Aid movement, *Women's Radical Reconstruction: The Freedmen's Aid Movement* (2003). "Like the most radical of the Radical Republicans," these women "argued for universal suffrage, land confiscation and redistribution, and an activist federal government." They failed in most of these goals, but "radical support for federal and Northern intervention were the beginnings of a new mode of women's reform closely linked to politics and government," Faulkner argued. "Though stymied in its time, their philosophy of federal responsibility and action remained a strong current in women's reform for the next century."³⁴⁸

Woman's Rights and Race

Perhaps surprisingly, the Declaration of Sentiments did not specifically mention race or slavery. This omission may have been a deliberate attempt to create a distance from the abolitionist movement, to sidestep its conflicted history over the question of woman's rights, and to bring together Garrisonian abolitionists from the American Anti-Slavery Society, political abolitionists, and those in New York State who had created a third way that combined a commitment both to political action and to woman's rights.

The complex intersection of gender and race, however, has been a major concern for historians of the woman's rights movement, both in terms of uncovering stories about individuals, events, and movements and in developing theoretical perspectives. In 1986, Barbara Hilkert Andolsen retold the story of the woman suffrage movement, highlighting both the parallels between the position of African Americans in slavery and women and the

³⁴⁷ Deborah Van Broekhoven, *The Devotion of These Women: Rhode Island in the Antislavery Network* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002); Susan Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, and Women's Political Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Judith Wellman, "Women and Radical Reform in Antebellum Upstate New York: A Profile of Grass Roots Female Abolitionists," in *Clio Was a Woman: Studies in the History of American Women*, ed. Mabel E. Deutrich and Virginia C. Purdy (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1980); Jean Fagan Yellin, *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1989).

³⁴⁸ Carol Faulkner, *Women's Radical Reconstruction: The Freedmen's Aid Movement* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2003), 2–3, 8.

tensions that emerged between white woman suffragists and African Americans after the Civil War.³⁴⁹

By the 1990s, influenced by postmodern discourses, historians explored in detail the concept of gender as it related to race and abolitionism. Kristin Hoganson, for example, argued that gender was central to national debates about slavery because it was

a central organizing concept in nineteenth-century culture. Gender permeated all debates, just the antislavery issue. It provided metaphors for legitimacy and illegitimacy, power and powerlessness, morality and amorality, and liberation and oppression. The language of gender linked the public and private and the political and the personal. It was an ideological language that appeared to transcend ideology; it was a language that could mobilize the masses.³⁵⁰

“The feminist principles held by white Garrisonian men helped strip them of the legitimacy needed to participate in political debate,” argued Hoganson. “The women who were active within Garrisonian ranks [such as the M’Clintocks and Amy Post] never had this legitimacy to begin with. Nevertheless, their activities lost them the amorphous political power wielded by politically transcendent ‘true women.’”³⁵¹

Reminiscent of the signers of the Declaration of Sentiments at Seneca Falls who viewed “woman” as a universal category, Christine Stansell, in a review article for *Gender & History* in 1999, explored the way that gender helped build solidarity between Northern white woman’s rights advocates and free black women, much as the women at Seneca Falls built coalitions with women such as Sojourner Truth. Viewing “woman” as a universal category blurred racial and economic differences, argued Stansell, and helped these women promote their right to equal access to political, social, and economic rights as American citizens.³⁵²

Contrasting the egalitarian biracial and dual sex networks of women (and men) who organized the Seneca Falls convention (including those in Rochester associated with the Posts; in Waterloo with the M’Clintocks, Hunts, and Pryors; and in Philadelphia with the Motts) with other woman’s rights groups suggests a striking contrast. Sisterhood might have been powerful, but it did not come naturally, easily, or often at all within many women’s organizations, even (or perhaps especially) within those associated with abolitionist organizations in urban areas. Amy Swerdlow’s exploration of the Ladies’ New York City Anti-Slavery Society, for example, outlined the conservative attitude that many abolitionist women took toward expanding their own rights as women. Debra Gold Hansen pointed out that, while members of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society espoused essentially feminist values, they nevertheless split the organization over conflicts that reflected both ideological and class differences. “White women,” she argued, “were divided by significant ideological and cultural barriers that made gender solidarity a temporary phenomenon at best.”³⁵³

³⁴⁹ Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, *“Daughters of Jefferson, Daughters of Bootblacks”: Racism and American Feminism* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1986).

³⁵⁰ Kristin Hoganson, “Garrisonian Abolitionists and the Rhetoric of Gender, 1850–1860,” *American Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (1993): 588.

³⁵¹ Hoganson, “Garrisonian Abolitionists,” 559.

³⁵² Christine Stansell, “Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Gender & History* (Great Britain) 11, no. 3 (1999): 419–32.

³⁵³ Amy Swerdlow, “Abolition’s Conservative Sisters: The Ladies’ New York City Anti-Slavery Societies, 1834–1840,” in *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women’s Political Culture in Antebellum America*,

A special focus on African American women emerged in the 1990s, including black women and abolitionism. In *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828–1860* (1992), Shirley J. Yee focused on the contributions of free black women within the abolitionist movement by looking at the lives of Harriet Tubman, Anna Douglass, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Sarah Parker Remond, and Sojourner Truth. “Between 1830 and 1860,” concluded Yee, “black women abolitionists had developed a collective feminist consciousness that reflected their particular experiences as black women as well as the aspects of sexism they shared with white women.” White women worked for equality within mostly white organizations, but black women worked within the black convention movement and, after the Civil War, within the black women’s club movement. “Racism characterized the early stages of the white feminist movement,” suggested Yee. “White feminist leaders had consciously ignored the concerns of black women, and very few black women, notably Truth, Tubman, and Harper, bridged the two movements by attending white feminist meetings.” All three of these women worked with the National Woman Suffrage Association.³⁵⁴

Other scholars highlighted the multicultural scholarship of women’s history in general and of the woman’s rights movement in particular. Ellen Carol DuBois and Vicki L. Ruiz edited *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women’s History*, which brought together key articles in women’s history from the previous decade. Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn compiled *Black Women in White America: An Historical Encyclopedia* (1993), a major collection of material relating to African American women, including black women and the woman’s rights movement. In 1996, Hine noted that, “within a span of thirty months at least a dozen monographs, biographies, and anthologies of original articles by and about black women will enrich our arsenal of revolutionary scholarship.” Among these were books relating to African American women and women’s rights, including Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women and the Struggle for the Vote, 1850–1920* (1998) and two biographies of New York State-born Sojourner Truth, one of the major icons of both African American and woman’s history in the United States (Carleton Mabee with Susan Mabee Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* [1993], and Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* [1996]).³⁵⁵

In 1997, Ann D. Gordon and Bettye Collier-Thomas edited a volume of essays on *African-American Women and the Vote, 1837–1965*. In this volume, Gordon suggested that the first convention of antislavery women in 1837 might well be considered the beginning of

eds. Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), 31–44; Debra Gold Hansen, *Strained Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 60.

³⁵⁴ Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Activists: A Study in Activism, 1828–1860* (Nashville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 111, 152.

³⁵⁵ Darlene Clark Hine, “Introduction,” *Journal of Women’s History* 8, no. 3 (1996): 162; Ellen Carol DuBois and Vicki L. Ruiz, eds., *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women’s History* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, eds., *Black Women in White America: An Historical Encyclopedia* (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Publishing, 1993); Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women and the Struggle for the Vote, 1850–1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Carleton Mabee with Susan Mabee Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* (New York: New York University Press, 1993); Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996); Dale Baum looked at Chinese immigrants and the woman suffrage question in Massachusetts, in “Woman Suffrage and the ‘Chinese Question’: The Limits of Radical Republicanism in Massachusetts, 1865–1876,” *New England Quarterly* 56 (March 1983): 60–77.

women's public activism, since women at that convention first made the demand to be heard in public. Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson echoed this view in *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America* (1998). The difference between 1837 and 1848 was, however, that women in 1837 demanded to be heard on behalf of the rights of people in slavery, not for the rights of women. "As moral and responsible beings," they argued, "the women of America are solemnly called upon by the spirit of the age and the signs of the times, fully to discuss the subject of slavery, that they may be prepared . . . to act as women, and as Christians, on this all-important subject [slavery]." ³⁵⁶

In 2007, Martha S. Jones published an important overview of *The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900*. Working from the perspective of public culture, Jones explored "how African American activist women, who occupied what was termed by many a marginal position in public life during the 1830s, became visible and authoritative community leaders by the 1890s." She argued that "the woman question shaped nearly every dimension of black public culture from the 1830s forward" and that "women were indispensable partners" in every aspect of African American resistance. ³⁵⁷

Scholars have also explored the impact of Native American women, especially Haudenosaunee women, on the nineteenth-century woman's rights movement. In *The Untold Story of the Iroquois Influence on Early Feminists* (1996) and *Sisters in Spirit: Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Influence on Early American Feminists* (2001), Sally Roesch Wagner looked at the impact of Haudenosaunee culture on European American women, particularly Matilda Joselyn Gage and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Wagner suggested that Native American women became powerful role models for European American woman suffragists, offering examples of male-female relationships very unlike the patriarchal European-American model and inspiring woman's rights leaders to understand the possibilities of living in very different ways. Publication of Lewis Henry Morgan, *League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee or Iroquois* (1851) and *Ancient Society* (1871); J.J. Bachofen, *Das Mutterrecht* (1861); and Friedrich Engels, *Origin of Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), promoted widely the idea of a matriarchate, strongly influencing the development of the emerging fields of anthropology and sociology, as well as the work of Gage and Stanton. ³⁵⁸

Gail H. Landsman, looking at different sources, developed a different interpretation, suggesting that, over time suffrage women viewed Native American women both as an argument for women's natural rights and also as a validation for the "civilizing" role that European American women played as the dominant U.S. culture spread westward. Nancy Shoemaker developed a social history of Seneca women in the late nineteenth century, emphasizing the continued importance of Haudenosaunee women in both families and political life. ³⁵⁹

³⁵⁶ Ann D. Gordon and Bettye Collier-Thomas *African-American Women and the Vote, 1837-1965* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997); Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 112-13.

³⁵⁷ Martha Jones, *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 2, 9, 22.

³⁵⁸ Sally Roesch Wagner, *The Untold Story of the Iroquois Influence on Early Feminists* (Aberdeen, South Dakota: Sky Carrier, 1996); Sally Roesch Wagner, *Sisters in Spirit: Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Influence on Early American Feminists* (Summertown, Tennessee: Native Voices, 2001).

³⁵⁹ Gail H. Landsman, "The 'Other' as Political Symbol: Images of Indians in the Woman Suffrage Movement," *Ethnohistory* 39, no. 3 (1992): 247-84; Nancy Shoemaker, "The Rise or Fall of Iroquois Women," *Journal of Women's History* 2, no. 3 (1991): 39-55.

Both Lucretia Mott and Amy Post had considerable contact with Seneca women and men in the 1830s and 1840s, as part of ongoing Seneca and Quaker cooperative efforts in dealing with land claims, education, and economic and political changes among the Haudenosaunee. The extent to which they and other Quaker women were influenced by Seneca women and gender roles within Haudenosaunee culture before the Seneca Falls convention (as compared to later in the century) needs further research. Further study of Lewis Henry Morgan may also help us understand the interaction between Haudenosaunee people and women before the Civil War, given that Morgan was a friend of David and Martha Wright when both families lived in Aurora, New York.

In the late twentieth century, historians began to explore whiteness as a category. Just as they had applied ideas about gender to men as well as women, so they began to apply concepts of race to European Americans, including women. As Peter Kolchin noted in 2005, “[S]uddenly whiteness studies are everywhere.” Fifty-one books were published between 1995 and 2005 with the word “whiteness” in their titles.³⁶⁰

No one has looked at whiteness specifically in relationship to the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention, but in 2002, Pauline Schloesser presented an insightful perspective on how ideals about racial equality related to changing ideas of gender equality. How, she asked, could women committed to universal ideals of natural rights (such as Mercy Otis Warren, Abigail Adams, and Judith Sargent Murray) end up essentially abandoning their active commitment to racial equality? Her answer was a concept that she called “racial patriarchy.” When women identified themselves as “the fair sex,” she argued, they created “a racialized sex group that lost consciousness of itself as bounded by race and class, retaining the memory of its identity as one based on gender alone.” When Elizabeth Cady Stanton walked arm-in-arm down the streets of Seneca Falls with Frederick Douglass, she challenged deeply ingrained ideals about women and class, as well as race.³⁶¹

Louise Michele Newman explored this theme for the woman's rights movement from 1870 to 1920 in her book *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (1999). She argued that much of feminist ideology in the late nineteenth century was irrevocably intertwined with evolutionary ideas that emphasized the cultural and biological superiority of Anglo-Saxon Protestants. When Anglo-Saxon Protestant women tried to stop lynching, help Indians, or ameliorate conditions for immigrants, they reflected a conviction that their own values and lifestyles were the appropriate norm for everyone. In other words, even as such women criticized sexual inequality within their own culture, they attempted to impose essentially middle-class white Protestant values on people of other classes and cultures. Their legitimacy within their own culture rested in part on their ability to impose patriarchal ideals on those outside it. Such an assertion does not ring true either for Stanton or for the Quakers who helped organize the Seneca Falls convention.³⁶²

As Peter Kolchin suggested, however, one difficulty with using whiteness as a variable is that it can be both everywhere and nowhere. “Race appears as both real and unreal, transitory and permanent, ubiquitous and invisible, everywhere and nowhere, everything and nothing.” Context is crucial. Louise Michele Newman, for example, “understates the range and complexity of feminist thought,” in Kolchin's opinion. In the future, suggested

³⁶⁰ Peter Kolchin, “Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America,” *Journal of American History* 89, no. 1 (2005): 1–43.

³⁶¹ Pauline Schloesser, *The Fair Sex: White Women and Racial Patriarchy in the Early Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

³⁶² Louise Michele Newman, *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Kolchin, whiteness studies might “include greater attention to historical and geographical context, more precision in delineating the multiple meanings of ‘whiteness,’ continued effort to move beyond a strictly binary approach to race even while emphasizing the distinctive ways African Americans experienced race and racism.” In this context, the theme of whiteness as applied to people at the woman’s rights convention in Seneca Falls—especially focusing on Stanton, Mott, Douglass, the M’Clintocks, Martha Wright, the Posts, and the Congregational Friends (for whom we have the most information)—will bear considerable fruit. In many ways, convention attendees do not fit the pattern that emerged for many other reform groups.³⁶³

Legal Reform

In last quarter of the twentieth century, scholars studied in detail what Stanton had pointed out clearly in the nineteenth century, that debates over legal reform in New York State laid the groundwork for the Seneca Falls convention. As a corollary, the woman’s rights movement had a powerful impact historically on legal issues in the United States and continues to have a powerful impact in the present. From 1985 to 2005, 225 articles in legal journals indexed by LexisNexis contained a reference to Seneca Falls. Much of this recent literature has shown that looking at legal debates from a gendered perspective reveals how thoroughly gender infused the development of our whole legal system. As Felice Batlan has argued, “[A]t the core of this diverse literature on gender and legal history is an understanding that analyzing gender changes our received understandings of American legal history.”³⁶⁴

One of the most active areas of research has been the continuing debate over married woman’s property acts. These debates formed the immediate context for the Seneca Falls convention, and they were particularly important because they challenged the very basis of English common law, which identified a married couple as one person, that is, the husband. Claudia Zaher presented a thorough overview of the main issues in her 2002 article, “When a Woman’s Marital Status Determined Her Legal Status: A Research Guide on the Common Law Doctrine of Coverture.”³⁶⁵

Other studies focused on changes in the law in particular states. For Seneca Falls, the most important were those that dealt with New York State. Peggy Rabkin focused on New York State in her influential *Fathers to Daughters: The Legal Foundations of Female Emancipation* (1980). In 1987, Elizabeth Bowles Warbasse published *The Changing Legal Rights of Married Women, 1800–1861*. In 1982, Norma Basch noted two approaches to married woman’s property reform in New York State in the 1830s, highlighting why this issue so agitated the debate over women’s political rights and set the stage for the Seneca Falls convention. One group argued that married women remained distinct legal entities and

³⁶³ Kolchin, “Whiteness Studies,” 15, 18, 39.

³⁶⁴ Felice Batlan, “Review Essay: Engendering Legal History,” *Law and Social Inquiry* 30 (Fall 2005): 823.

³⁶⁵ Claudia Zaher, “When a Woman’s Marital Status Determined Her Legal Status: A Research Guide on the Common Law Doctrine of Coverture,” *Law Library Journal* 94 (Summer 2002). Other studies include Hendrik Hartog, *Man and Wife in America: A History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000); Reva B. Siegel, “Home as Work: The First Woman’s Rights Claims Concerning Wives’ Household Labor, 1850–1880,” *Yale Law Journal* 103 (March 1994).

that, under equity law, their property should be exempt from their husbands' creditors. The other group believed that current law inevitably consigned married women to a dependent status and that only the vote would confirm their equality under the law. Several studies focused on married women's property acts at the state level (in Oregon, Georgia, and California, for example).³⁶⁶

Some scholars focused on larger questions of marriage and the law, a question that preoccupied Stanton and many early woman's rights activists, as well. Historians emphasized law as a social construct and gender, marriage, and the family as touchstones for changing social and legal values. As Felice Batlan argued, all these works make us "question some of our basic assumptions about legal history," seriously challenging, for example, "whether there was a transition from a legal regime based on status to one grounded in contract. African American men and women and white women remained within a world in which their rights were based on status—a status that deeply implicated their contractual relations."³⁶⁷

Transnational Feminism

In the late twentieth century, scholars showed considerable interest in the influence of woman's rights ideas that reached the United States from England and France and also in the impact of Americans' ideas on Western Europeans. Lucretia Mott and Martha Wright were both powerfully influenced by reading British author Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, first published in 1792. Stanton often related how the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London was the real beginning of the idea of a woman's rights convention in the United States, Paulina Wright Davis wrote that "this great movement is intended to meet the wants, not of America only, but of the whole world."

In the 1990s, historians began to explore in detail the importance of transatlantic feminist networks. In 1991, Ellen Carol DuBois suggested that the woman's movement was "a self-consciously transnational popular political movement," a theme she also explored in

³⁶⁶ Peggy Rabkin, *Fathers to Daughters: The Legal Foundations of Female Emancipation* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1980); Elizabeth Bowles Warbasse, *The Changing Legal Rights of Married Women, 1800–1861* (New York: Garland, 1987); Norma Basch, *In the Eyes of the Law: Women, Marriage, and Property in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982). See, for example, Richard H. Chused, "Married Women's Property Law: 1800–1850," *Georgetown Law Journal* 71 (June 1983) and "The Oregon Donation Act of 1850 and Nineteenth Century Federal Married Woman's Property Law," *Law and History Review* 2, no. 1 (1984): 44–78; Inara K. Scott, "A Window for Change: Conflicting Ideologies and Legal Reforms in Late Nineteenth-Century Oregon," *Willamette Law Review* (2001); Sandra R. Zagier Zayac and Robert A. Zayac Jr., "Georgia's Married Women's Property Act: An Effective Challenge to Coverture," *Texas Journal of Women and the Law* 15 (Fall 2005); Donna C. Schuele, "'None Could Deny The Eloquence Of This Lady': Women, Law, And Government In California, 1850–1890," *California History* 81, nos. 3–4 (2003): 169–98.

³⁶⁷ Martha Minow, "'Forming Underneath Everything that Grows': Toward a History of Family Law," *Wisconsin Law Review* (July–August 1985); Michael Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Katherine M. Franke, "Becoming a Citizen: Reconstruction Era Regulation of African American Marriages," *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 11 (1999): 251–310; Ariela Dubler, "In the Shadow of Marriage: Single Women and the Legal Construction of the Family and the State," *Yale Law Journal* 112 (2003): 1641–1715; Batlan, "Review Essay: Engendering Legal History," 832.

an article on Harriot Stanton Blatch and the New York suffrage movement at the turn of the century.³⁶⁸

Emphasizing an organizational perspective, Christine Bolt treated Seneca Falls in an international context in her 1993 book *The Women's Movements in the United States and Britain from the 1790s to the 1920s*. Early woman's rights activists in the United States developed little formal organizational structure, Bolt noted, and relied on conventions, lectures, and journals to keep the movement alive. In "‘To Educate Women into Rebellion’: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Creation of a Transatlantic Network of Radical Suffragists," Sandra Stanley Holton emphasized the roots of the radical suffrage movement in Britain in the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention. She highlighted the continuing importance of Stanton in Britain in the 1880s and 1890s, as Stanton's visits energized feminists allied with the Bright family to form, in 1889, the Women's Franchise League, dedicated to suffrage for married as well as single women.³⁶⁹

In 1998, in "Re-Rooting American Women's Activism: Global Perspectives on 1848," published appropriately in an Austrian journal, Nancy Hewitt argued that although historians have often viewed the Seneca Falls convention as the birth of the woman's rights movement in the United States, we can learn much about the emerging woman's movement by placing it in the context of contemporary events in Europe, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Native American societies. Hewitt also emphasized the transatlantic context for the "radical universalist" abolitionist-feminists of western New York and eastern Pennsylvania in "Origin Stories: Remapping First Wave Feminism."³⁷⁰

Karen Offen compared with the women at Seneca Falls with suffragists in France in 1848 in "Women and the Question of ‘Universal’ Suffrage in 1848: A Transatlantic Comparison of Suffragist Rhetoric" (1999), arguing that the rhetoric of French and American feminists was similar, although French women claimed they had been "forgotten" by men, whereas American women felt they had been "deceived."³⁷¹

Bonnie Anderson, in a thoroughly researched and mature work, *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movement, 1830–1860* (2000), placed Seneca Falls (and the entire early U.S. woman's rights movement) in the larger context of French, German, and English reform and revolutionary movements. Inspired by reading Jeanne Deroin and Pauline Roland's letter from a French jail to U.S. woman's rights activists in 1851, Anderson began to study the nineteenth-century woman's rights movement in a larger transnational context. She discovered that

³⁶⁸ Ellen Carol DuBois, "Woman Suffrage and the Left: An Internationalist Socialist-Feminist Perspective," *New Left Review* 186 (1991): 20–45; Ellen Carol DuBois, "Working Class Women, Class Relations, and Suffrage Militance: Stanton Blatch and the New York Woman Suffrage Movement, 1894–1909," in Dubois and Ruiz, *Unequal Sisters*.

³⁶⁹ Christine Bolt, *The Women's Movements in the United States and Britain from the 1790s to the 1920s* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993); Sandra Stanley Holton, "‘To Educate Women into Rebellion’: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Creation of a Transatlantic Network of Radical Suffragists," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 4 (1994): 1112–36.

³⁷⁰ Nancy A. Hewitt, "Re-Rooting American Women's Activism: Global Perspectives on 1848," *Osterreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* (Austria) 9, no. 4 (1998): 457–70; Nancy A. Hewitt, "Origin Stories: Remapping First Wave Feminism," *Proceedings of the Third Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University, 2001).

³⁷¹ Karen Offen, "Women and the Question of ‘Universal’ Suffrage in 1848: A Transatlantic Comparison of Suffrage Rhetoric," *NWSA Journal* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1999).

events historians had previously viewed as phenomena located within individual societies . . . really occurred within the matrix of a feminism that transcended national boundaries. Isolated among their compatriots, early feminists reached out to their counterparts in other lands. . . . I realized that what I was studying was actually an early loosely knit, international women's movement, the first ever created. Participants considered themselves to be joined in working for a universal cause.

Anderson did not hesitate to call these women feminists as well as radicals, because they sought both to transform women's lives and to include oppressed people everywhere in one great campaign for equality and human rights.³⁷²

Anderson appropriately placed the Seneca Falls convention in the context of the French Revolution of 1848. Lucretia Mott, she noted, thought the Seneca Indians were "learning from the political agitations abroad . . . imitating the movements of France and all Europe in seeking a larger liberty—more independence." The *New York Herald* noted, "[T]his is the age of revolutions. . . . [But] the work of revolution is no longer confined to the Old World, nor to the masculine gender. The flag of revolution has been hoisted, for the second time, on this side of the Atlantic." Stanton's own woman's rights speech in 1848 (although not given at Seneca Falls, as Anderson erroneously suggested) was full of references to woman's rights internationally. Through her examples and her rhetoric, wrote Anderson, "Stanton drove home the identification of a woman's movement with the forces of revolution in 1848."³⁷³

Legal scholars also focused on Seneca Falls and the early U.S. woman's rights movement as part of an international feminist effort. Linda J. Kirk compared Australia and the United States, for example. Jessica Neuwirth traced the development of international human rights for women in "From Seneca Falls to the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Gauging the Campaign for the Human Rights of Women" (1999). "Although we still suffer in our great work from the misconception, misrepresentation and ridicule that was anticipated by our foremothers," she concluded, "issues of violence against women are now perceived as legitimate concerns of state responsibility."³⁷⁴

Women and Party Politics

The rise of a two-party system and the abolition of property requirements for white male voters in the 1820s and 1830s helped create a formal political role for adult white males, including voting and forming political parties. Through these activities, white men used

³⁷² Bonnie Anderson, *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movement, 1830–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2–3.

³⁷³ Lucretia Mott to *Liberator*, 24 August 1848; *New York Herald* cited in Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage* 1:805; Anderson, *Joyous Greetings*, 171–72.

³⁷⁴ Linda J. Kirk, "Exclusion to Emancipation: A Comparative Analysis of Women's Citizenship in Australia and the United States, 1869–1921," *West Virginia Law Review* 97 (Spring 1995): 725–41; Jessica Neuwirth, "From Seneca Falls to the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Gauging the Campaign for the Human Rights of Women," *Journal of International and Comparative Law* 5 (Spring 1999): 344–45.

politics to define a sense not only of citizenship but also of manhood. It was this world to which the women and men at Seneca Falls demanded entry for women as well as men, African Americans as well as people of European descent. Women, on the other hand, traditionally used informal political methods, building on their moral authority as mothers to expand the private sphere of “home” into the community, carrying out social service work through voluntary organizations.

Several authors dealt with this tension between women's and men's political roles and with the impact of women and gender issues on major party politics. Many emphasized that, although women were not formal voters or officeholders, they actively participated in politics. Michael D. Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes: Gender and American Antislavery Politics*, considered the impact of gender on the Liberty, Free Soil, and Republican parties. He argued that, as middle-class city dwellers and commercial farmers involved in the market revolution joined the Liberty Party, “they added both domestic feminism and calls for women's equality and voting rights to the party's dialogue on gender.” Not all Liberty Party voters supported woman's rights, however. Disagreement over woman's rights divided Liberty Party voters and forced the party itself “to present the whole spectrum of opinions in the hope that by voicing all opinions they would be able to attract the broadest possible range of support.”³⁷⁵

Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia*, looked at women's influence in Virginia, where white women from slaveholding families worked to influence the votes of men across the political spectrum. After the early 1850s, however, women were less welcome as partisan public speakers, perhaps, suggested Varon, because of a backlash against the emerging woman's rights movement that began at Seneca Falls.³⁷⁶

In an important study, *Women and the Republican Party, 1854–1924*, Melanie Gustafson argued that “the history of women's partisan activism extends longer and deeper than has generally been recognized.” From its origins in 1854, the Republican Party, rooted in antislavery, became the focus of the woman suffrage movement that began at Seneca Falls. Stanton's speech to the Wide-Awakes, a young men's Republican group, at Seneca Falls in 1860, for example, was greeted by a local lawyer with pleas for support for the Republican Party. Quaker abolitionists and woman's rights activists supported Anna Dickinson, one of the country's best-known Republican woman orators. Dickinson, a Quaker, gave her first speech at a meeting of Progressive Friends in Kennet Square, Pennsylvania.

In an influential article followed by her book, *Gender and the Transformation of Politics: Public and Private Life in New York, 1870–1930* (1989), Paula Baker redefined politics to include the informal work of women. Politics, she wrote, was “any action, formal or informal, taken to affect the course or behavior of government or the community.” Confronted by rapid changes in urbanization, industrialization, and immigration, the sharp separation between public (male) and private (female) spheres eroded. In the twentieth century, governments began to take over many of the social service functions that women's groups had once performed, and men began to influence government informally, as women had always done. Formal suffrage for women reflected this breakdown of the nineteenth-century ideal of separate spheres. “Men granted women the vote,” Baker concluded, “when the importance of the male culture of politics and the meaning of the vote changed.” In this

³⁷⁵ Michael D. Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes: Gender and American Antislavery Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 33; *Chicago Western Citizen*, July 21, 1846, and *Cadiz Liberty Advocate*, February 25, 1845, quoted in Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes*, 36–37.

³⁷⁶ Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 101.

elegantly written overview, dealing entirely with one of the main demands of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments, Baker did not once mention, however, the Seneca Falls convention.³⁷⁷

Rebecca Edwards, in *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era*, took the opposite view. She agreed that “politics were about faith and family order,” but she defined politics narrowly, “offering the warp to the woof of recent feminist scholarship.” Nineteenth-century Americans viewed politics as “the system by which factions and parties won control of government through elections,” she argued. In this argument, she adopted the definition of suffragists themselves, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton (whose views she explored). Such a definition helped explain the plateau between 1897 and 1910 (often called the “doldrums”) when suffragists won no more state victories. Through the 1890s, argued Edwards, suffragists, like other interest groups, worked through partisan politics, aided by third-party politics and Populism. The realignment of parties in the 1890s, however, excluded women from partisan roles and led them to emphasize nonpartisan virtues such as motherhood, morality, and their positions as consumers and workers.³⁷⁸

Whether historians used a broad or a narrow view of politics, they explored the tension between the woman suffrage movement (and in some cases larger issues of woman's rights) that emerged at Seneca Falls and major political parties. In every case, scholars have concluded that gender played a far larger role in national politics than had previously been realized.

Women and Men

Nineteenth-century woman's rights advocates, including those at Seneca Falls, revealed a variety of attitudes toward gender. Some argued that women and men were very different in character. Others, such as Stanton and Mott, identified women and men as more alike than different. Still others, such as Margaret Fuller and many Transcendentalists, saw male and female characteristics in both women and men.³⁷⁹

Whatever their beliefs, woman's rights advocates used them to argue that women deserved the vote. Utah, for example, was dominated by Mormons and allowed polygamy. Even after the U.S. Supreme Court passed an antipolygamy ruling in 1879, Stanton, Anthony, and the National Woman Suffrage Association supported the right of Mormon women to vote.³⁸⁰

As Nancy Cott has suggested, historians of women successfully convinced most mainstream historians in the late twentieth century that “gender *matters* in social and

³⁷⁷ Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and the American Political Society, 1780–1920,” *American Historical Review* 89 (June 1984): 620–47; Paula Baker, *Gender and the Transformation of Politics: Public and Private Life in New York, 1870–1930* (New York: Free Press, 1989).

³⁷⁸ Rebecca Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

³⁷⁹ Jean V. Matthews, “Consciousness of Self and Consciousness of Sex in Antebellum Feminism,” *Journal of Women's History* 5, no. 1 (1993): 61–78.

³⁸⁰ Joan Smyth Iverson, “A Debate on the American Home: The Antipolygamy Controversy, 1880–1890,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1, no. 4 (1991): 585–602.

historical analysis.” That insight has become the basis for gender studies that analyze men’s behavior as well as that of women.³⁸¹

Almost one-third of the signers of the Declaration of Sentiments at Seneca Falls were male, and men have always been important supporters of the woman’s rights movement. Until recently, however, only a few historians have focused attention on them. In 1992, Micahel S. Kimmel and Thomas E. Mosmiller edited *Against the Tide: Pro-Feminist Men in the United States, 1776–1990: A Documentary History*. Organized topically, this work is a stunning collection of more than 130 documents relating to women’s rights. The authors suggested that the Seneca Falls convention met “not in a historical vacuum, but in a context of seventy-five years of slow, quiet agitation for changes in women’s position. . . . Some men supported women’s rights even before Seneca Falls. . . . Some men even advocated suffrage before 1848.” Kimmel and Mosmiller give examples of such abolitionists, black and white, including David Ruggles, William E. Channing, William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and Frederick Douglass, as well as novelist Charles Brockden Brown and reformer John Neal—who were early supporters of woman suffrage. “I tell you,” Neal wrote to Margaret Fuller in 1845, “there is no hope for woman, till she has a hand in making the law—no chance for her till her *vote* is worth as much as a man’s vote.” While these works did not deal specifically with the signers of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments, they do suggest perspectives from which scholars may begin to approach Seneca Falls in the future.³⁸²

In 1995, Bradford Miller, a Seneca Falls resident, published *Returning to Seneca Falls: The First Woman’s Rights Convention and Its Meaning for Men and Women Today* reflected on the lessons of Seneca Falls, especially through the examples of Frederick Douglass and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, for men and women in the United States in the late twentieth century.³⁸³

Religion

Religion was one of the key variables that motivated antebellum reformers. For Elizabeth Cady Stanton, spiritual values remained a compelling interest all of her life, second only to woman’s rights, culminating in publication of *The Woman’s Bible* in 1898. Woman’s rights ideals infused theological discussions throughout the Protestant world, with such diverse results as Matilda Joslyn Gage’s *Woman, Church, and State*, Frances Willard and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (perhaps the largest women’s group in the United States), Marietta Holley’s book-length series featuring Methodist Samantha Allen’s comments on American life (people called Holley the “female Mark Twain”), and Mary

³⁸¹ Nancy Cott, “On Men’s History and Women’s History,” *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America*, eds. Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 205–11.

³⁸² Micahel S. Kimmel and Thomas E. Mosmiller, eds., *Against the Tide: Pro-Feminist Men in the United States, 1776–1990: A Documentary History* (Boston: Beacon, 1992); Laura McCall and Donald Yacovone, eds., *A Shared Experience: Men, Women and the History of Gender* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Donald Yacovone, *Samuel Joseph May and the Dilemmas of the Liberal Persuasion, 1797–1871* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1991); Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, eds., *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990).

³⁸³ Bradford Miller, *Returning to Seneca Falls: The First Woman’s Rights Convention and Its Meaning for Men and Women Today* (Hudson, New York: Lindisfarne, 1995).

Baker Eddy's creation of the worldwide Church of Christ, Scientist, based on the idea of a Father-Mother God.³⁸⁴

Beginning in the 1980s, the religious background of early woman's rights advocates became a topic of special interest. Historians debated the impact of evangelical women on the woman's rights movement. Was support for woman's rights based primarily in the anticlerical, antisectarian, anarchistic wing of abolitionism, with support from religious groups such as the Unitarians? Or did it also find root among revivalistic evangelical groups? Historians such as Nancy Hardesty have argued the latter position. Why else, these historians ask, would the Seneca Falls convention have been held in a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel and Oberlin College, a center of evangelicalism, be a hotbed for future woman's rights activists such as Antoinette Brown and Lucy Stone? Beverly Ann Zink-Sawyer outlined a more complex position, in which some clergy supported woman's rights and some diametrically opposed it.³⁸⁵

Douglas Strong argued that in order to understand the position of these woman's rights supporters, we need to realize that they were "neither Garrisonian anti-institutionalists nor evangelically 'orthodox' supporters of established institutions. Rather, they held to a position in between these two extremes." They were, he argued, part of a group of churches (including Freewill Baptists, Wesleyans, Union churches, antislavery Congregationalists, and Congregational Friends) that cooperated together both in antisectarian religious efforts and support for the Liberty Party.³⁸⁶

In 1986, Margaret Hope Bacon pointed out the importance of Quaker women at Seneca Falls in many of her books, including *Mothers of Feminism: The Story of Quaker Women in America* (1986), in which she noted that four of the five planners of the Seneca Falls convention were Quakers and that "the pioneer role that Quaker women played in the development of feminism in this country had its origins over two hundred years before the convention at Seneca Falls."³⁸⁷

Recent research has refined and deepened our understanding of the role that Quakers played at the Seneca Falls convention. Christopher Densmore and Judith Wellman suggested that about one-quarter of the known signers of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments were Friends. Without this group of reform-minded Quakers, whom Nancy Hewitt labeled "ultraists" and "radical universalists," the Seneca Falls convention would not have happened.

³⁸⁴ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible* (New York: European Publishing Company, 1898); Matilda Joselyn Gage, *Woman, Church, and State* (1893; repr., Sally Roesch Wagner, ed., Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 2002); Kathi Kern, *Mrs. Stanton's Bible* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001); Open Collections Program, Harvard University, "Women Working, 1800-1930," s.v. "Marietta Holley," http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/www/people_holley.html; Mary Baker Eddy Library for the Betterment of Humanity, "Mary Baker Eddy: Life," <http://www.marybakereddylibrary.org/marybakereddy/life.jhtml>.

³⁸⁵ Nancy Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the 19th Century* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon, 1984); Beverly Ann Zink-Sawyer, *The Preachers and the Suffragists: The Role of Preachers in the Ideological Transformation of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the United States* (Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University, 1997); Beverly Ann Zink-Sawyer, "From Preachers to Suffragists: Enlisting the Pulpit in the Early Movement for Woman's Rights," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (2000).

³⁸⁶ Douglas M. Strong, *Perfectionist Politics: Abolitionism and the Religious Tensions of American Democracy* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999).

³⁸⁷ Margaret Hope Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism: The Story of Quaker Women in America* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986).

As Hewitt has argued, Quaker woman's rights advocates, raised with egalitarian values, were propelled by tensions within their own meetings to leave Quakerism and express their Quaker values in the larger world. Amy Post, for example, a signer of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments, was raised a Quaker on Long Island, New York. She became an anchor of the abolitionist-feminist "Post family circle" in Rochester, New York, and epitomized this progression. Differentiated from the less radical reformers in Rochester, whom Hewitt called "perfectionists" by their commitment to Garrisonian abolitionism, these ultraists worked in mixed-race groups, helped organized the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society, raised money through antislavery fairs, and became staunch woman's rights activists. These reforming Quakers helped organize both the Seneca Falls and Rochester woman's rights conventions.³⁸⁸

Many of the Quakers who attended the Seneca Falls convention originated in southeastern Pennsylvania. This area also became an early center of the Congregational and Progressive Friends movement, and Quakers from the region sponsored the first Pennsylvania woman's rights convention in West Chester in 1852. Albert F. Wahl outlined the development of Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends, which began in 1853 at the Kennett Meetinghouse. Two years later these Friends built the new Longwood Meetinghouse, where they continued to meet until 1940 and which still stands today.³⁸⁹

Woman Suffrage and Constitutional Issues

In the view of historian Ellen Carol DuBois, the success of the Seneca Falls convention rested on the widespread American commitment to equal rights.

The demand for political equality, [she argued], could inspire a women's rights movement among women from 1848 on because political democracy was simultaneously a widely held belief and a radical assertion when applied to women. Political equality for women rested on the popular republican tradition that insisted on equal rights for all, with the franchise the crowning jewel of individual freedom. Women's rights advocates could speak of their demands in terms of the "rights, for which our fathers fought, bled, and died," seeking only to claim women's place in the glorious American political experiment.³⁹⁰

Implicit in the demands made at Seneca Falls was the assumption that the Constitution excluded women from those equal rights. Most contemporaries and historians have agreed

³⁸⁸ Christopher Densmore, "Quaker Comeouters and the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention of 1848," unpublished paper, Conference on New York State History, 4–5 June, 1993; Nancy A. Hewitt, "Amy Kirby Post," *University of Rochester Library Bulletin* 37 (1984); Nancy A. Hewitt, "Feminist Friends: Agrarian Quakers and the Emergence of Woman's Rights in America," *Feminist Studies* 12, no. 1 (1986), 27–50; Nancy A. Hewitt, "The Fragmentation of Friends: The Consequences for Quaker Women in Antebellum America," in *Witnesses for Change: Quaker Women Over Three Centuries*, eds. Elisabeth Potts Brown and Susan Mosher Stuard (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 93–108; Hewitt, "Origin Stories: Remapping First Wave Feminism"; Judith Wellman, "The Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention: A Study of Social Networks," *Journal of Women's History* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 9–37; Wellman, *The Road to Seneca Falls*, 91–120, 206.

³⁸⁹ Wahl, "Congregational or Progressive Friends"; Albert F. Wahl, "Longwood Meeting: Public Forum for the American Democratic Faith," *Pennsylvania History*, 42, no. 1 (1975): 43–69.

³⁹⁰ Ellen DuBois, "Outgrowing the Compact of the Fathers: Equal Rights, Woman Suffrage, and the United States Constitution, 1820–1878," *Journal of American History* 74, no. 3 (1987): 836–62. 841.

with that assessment. Woman's rights advocates in New York State debated women's citizenship during state constitutional conventions in 1821 and 1846, as Judith Wellman pointed out, not on the basis of constitutional precedents, but by reference to the Declaration of Independence.³⁹¹

In 2002, however, Jan Ellen Lewis, in a careful reading of *Records of the Federal Convention*, concluded that "implicit . . . in the Constitution's doctrine of representation was that the new government, in securing the happiness of society, was to look after women—not as women, but as members of society. To put it another way, the liberalism of the Constitution is far more capacious than we have generally imagined." This was the argument that Stanton, Anthony, and others used in 1866 when they petitioned Congress for universal suffrage, Lewis noted, arguing that the Constitution "classes us as 'free people,' and counts us as *whole* persons in the basis for representation."³⁹²

Ultimately, however, that argument did not prevail, as Ellen Carol DuBois showed in "Outgrowing the Compact of the Fathers: Equal Rights, Woman Suffrage, and the United States Constitution, 1820–1878." DuBois dealt with three periods of changing relationships between the woman's rights movement and the Constitution. In the first period, the antebellum years, "women's rights were linked to other radical equal rights traditions and were widely understood as alternatives to 'separate spheres' notions of the subordinate place of women." In the second period, after the Civil War, women focused on constitutional change, first arguing for equal rights for all people and then, when the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments passed without woman suffrage, "for the equality not of individuals but of sexes." During the third phase, beginning about 1870, woman's rights advocates struggled to define the meaning of the Constitution as it had been amended and to interpret the new amendments as equal rights amendments. They used arguments advanced by Frances and Virginia Minor of Missouri and others that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments actually gave supremacy to national rather than state citizenship and that national citizenship guaranteed suffrage. Since the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed "rights and immunities," including suffrage, to all native-born or naturalized citizens, and because women were clearly citizens, then women had the right to vote. In this view, which suffragists called the New Departure, women had only to take what was already theirs.³⁹³

Beginning in 1871, women in many parts of the country (including Virginia Minor in St. Louis, Missouri; Susan B. Anthony and others in Rochester, New York; several African American women in Washington, D.C.; and Margaret Pryor and Elizabeth M'Clintock, signers from Seneca Falls living in Vineland, New Jersey) tried unsuccessfully to vote using this argument. In 1872, Victoria Woodhull presented the case to the House Judiciary Committee. In three Supreme Court cases in the mid-1870s (*Bradwell v. State*, 1873; *Slaughterhouse Cases*, 1873; and *Minor v. Happersett*, 1875), suffragists lost their argument in decisions that influenced subsequent cases involving limitations on black male suffrage, as

³⁹¹ Judith Wellman, "Women's Rights, Republicanism, and Revolutionary Rhetoric in Antebellum New York State," *New York History* 69, no. 3 (1988): 353–84.

³⁹² Jan Ellen Lewis based her assertion on the suggestion of James Wilson, representative from Pennsylvania, that each state be represented "in proportion to the whole number of white & other free Citizens and inhabitants of every age sex & condition including those bound to servitude for a term of years and three fifths of all other persons not comprehended in the foregoing description, except Indians paying taxes, in each state." Jan Ellen Lewis, "Why the Constitution Includes Women," *Common-Place* (2002): <http://www.common-place.org/vol-02/no-04/>>

³⁹³ Ellen Carol DuBois, "Outgrowing the Compact of the Fathers: Equal Rights, Woman Suffrage, and the United States Constitution, 1820–1878," *Journal of American History* 74, no. 3 (1987): 836–62.

well. Legal historian Adam Winkler suggested that these constitutional challenges were in the forefront of a new way of interpreting the Constitution as a living document, moving away from looking at the intent of the founders to “an evolving, progressive ‘living constitutionalism’—in which constitutional provisions are unmoored from their originalist grounding and interpreted to meet present societal needs.” This third approach failed by the mid-1870s.³⁹⁴

Foiled in their attempt to argue that women already had voting rights, women of the National Woman Suffrage Association made clear their demands for full citizenship rights at the celebration of the nation's centennial in Philadelphia in July 1876 by presenting their Declaration of Rights. Then, at its tenth anniversary in 1878 (coincidentally also the thirtieth anniversary of the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention), the National Woman Suffrage Association introduced a new goal: a federal suffrage amendment. This goal was eventually achieved with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment.

Ellen Carol DuBois pointed out that this move coincided with a shift from the equal rights argument to one based on the idea that women were essentially different from men. Women needed the vote both to protect themselves and to ensure that, as women, they could contribute their special gifts to the larger society. Stanton herself continued to assert the equal rights interpretation of the Constitution, however. She argued for an enlarged and flexible interpretation of the Constitution, as DuBois noted. “The numerous demands by the people for national protection in many rights not specified by the constitution,” wrote Stanton, “prove that the people have outgrown the compact that satisfied the fathers.”³⁹⁵

In 1998, in *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America*, Nancy Isenberg raised new questions about the context and meaning of the Seneca Falls convention. Influenced by debates about the meaning of gender, citizenship, and the public sphere, Isenberg downplayed the importance of particular leaders or events (including the Seneca Falls convention and Elizabeth Cady Stanton), focusing instead on gender as a category. Suggesting that woman's rights advocates had reduced the movement to the one issue of voting rights (which actually did not happen until the 1870s), Isenberg looked at women's

³⁹⁴ Adam Winkler, “A Revolution Too Soon: Woman Suffragists and the ‘Living Constitution,’” *New York University Law Review* 76 (November 2001) 1456–1526. Even after *Minor v. Happersett*, a small group of suffragists, epitomized by Mary V. Walker in *The Crowning Constitutional Argument* (1907) continued to use this argument; Dale Walker, *Mary Edwards Walker: Above and Beyond* (New York: Forge Books, 2005).

³⁹⁵ DuBois, “Outgrowing the Compact of the Fathers,” 862; Sally Roesch Wagner, *A Time of Protest: Suffragists Challenge the Republic, 1870–1887* (Sacramento, California: Spectrum Publications, 1987), gives an excellent description of the 1876 event. Several scholars looked at the implications of woman suffrage and woman's rights in this period for constitutional questions continuing into the present, especially relating to the Fourteenth and Nineteenth Amendments. Nina Morais, “Sex Discrimination and the Fourteenth Amendment: Lost History,” *Yale Law Journal* 97 (May 1988), looked at the history of the Fourteenth Amendment's use in equal protection based on sex as well as race. In “She the People: The Nineteenth Amendment, Sex Equality, Federalism, and the Family,” *Harvard Law Review* (February 2002), Reva B. Siegel proposed “a synthetic reading of the Fourteenth and Nineteenth Amendments that is grounded in the history of the woman suffrage campaign.” Patricia A. Cain and Linda K. Kerber, “Subversive Legacies: Learning from History/Constructing the Future,” *Texas Journal of Women and the Law* 13 (Fall 2003), described the ways in which gender can inform the teaching of constitutional history in creative ways. Ellen Carol DuBois published a collected edition of many of her articles on this topic in *Woman Suffrage and Women's Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 1998). See also Linda Kerber, ed., *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), a collection of articles that highlighted ongoing debates about the relationship between women and citizenship.

rights and the church, family, and citizenship to help understand the larger political landscape of antebellum America. She concluded that “antebellum feminism was significant not in its legislative victories, but because its mature critique was not confined to women’s issues—it directly shaped the historical development of a language of constitutional sovereignty and American democracy.” Without any serious look at Seneca Falls, Isenberg concluded that if any early woman’s rights convention was important, it was the one in Salem, Ohio, in 1850 because of its relationship to the Ohio constitutional convention.³⁹⁶

In a sophisticated and richly detailed study, *Liberty, Equality, and Justice: Civil Rights, Women’s Rights, and the Regulation of Business, 1865–1932* (1997), Ross Evans Paulsen situated these issues in the context of a continuing search to define liberty, equality, and justice in the United States. As he noted in his subtitle, he focused on three major areas: civil rights, women’s rights, and business. He concluded that Americans ranked individual liberty higher than equality or justice, and as a consequence, they created little change and had little sense of that larger commitment to community upon which any democracy ultimately depends.³⁹⁷

State and Local Suffrage and Western Women

As the population moved west during the nineteenth century, so did the suffrage movement. Beginning in the 1850s, many signers of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments moved west to work in states as diverse as Michigan (Catharine Fish Stebbins), Washington (Catharine Paine Blaine), and California (Deborah Scott Crittenden). Amelia Bloomer, who attended the Seneca Falls convention although she did not sign the declaration, migrated from Seneca Falls to Iowa, where she spearheaded woman’s suffrage work in Council Bluffs. Beginning in the late 1860s, Stanton and Anthony themselves lectured throughout the West.³⁹⁸

In the late twentieth century, scholars began to look more closely at state and local suffrage campaigns. Dozens of local studies enhanced our understanding of how the suffrage movement functioned throughout the nation from the Civil War to 1920. As identified in the online database *America: History and Life*, the most prolific publishing area concerning suffrage after the Civil War, in terms of sheer numbers of articles, related to suffrage in various states, especially (but not exclusively) western states. California offered a good example. Beginning in the immediate postwar period, Robert J. Chandler noted the influence of spiritualism on the suffrage movement, connecting New York State with California. Roger Levenson focused on the connection between women printers and the woman’s rights movement in California. Linda Van Ingen noted that, although suffrage passed in California

³⁹⁶ Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 6, 13, 204.

³⁹⁷ Ross Evans Paulson, *Liberty, Equality, and Justice: Civil Rights, Women’s Rights, and the Regulation of Business, 1865–1932* (Duke University Press, 1997).

³⁹⁸ “Mrs. Catharine A.F. Stebbins.” *American Women*, vol. 2 (1873), 681; Richard Seiber, *Memoirs of Puget Sound, Early Seattle, 1853–56, The Letters of David and Catherine Blaine* (Seattle, Washington: Ye Galleon, 1978); “Deborah Scott Crittenden,” in *History of the San Francisco Bay Region*, vol. 3 (American Historical Society, 1924), 21–22.

in 1911, women did not successfully become candidates for office themselves until after the federal suffrage amendment was ratified nine years later.³⁹⁹

The most important study of the California suffrage movement was Gayle Gullett's *Citizens: The Emergence and Development of the California Women's Movement, 1880-1911* (2000). Building on supposed womanly values of altruism, morality, and civic duty, California women created an overtly white Protestant middle-class political movement they called "organized womanhood." They worked from the 1880s to build a major political organization that finally brought California into the suffrage camp in 1911. As a major western state, California's story is clearly a western story, as Gullett noted. At the same time, it is important not to overestimate California's uniqueness. Major California suffrage leaders came from the East. (These women included Los Angeles clubwoman Caroline Seymour Severance from Canandaigua and Auburn, New York, as well as Seneca Falls signer Deborah Scott Crittenden.) Eastern leaders spent considerable time and resources supporting the California campaign.⁴⁰⁰ And the victory in California had a major impact on the national suffrage movement.⁴⁰¹

Many studies focused on individual communities and individual women, as well as statewide efforts. These suggested the intricate intertwining of suffrage and temperance at the local level. Samuel J. Tamburro related the story of Frances Jennings Casement. In cooperation with other groups, such as the local chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Casement made the Equal Rights Association of Painesville, Ohio, a leader in the suffrage movement. In South Dakota, Emma Smith Devoe worked for suffrage from 1890 to 1918, organizing members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union to create the South Dakota Equal Suffrage Association, with more than forty chapters throughout the state. In "The Perfect Thirty-Six: Tennessee and the Woman Suffrage Movement," Janette C. Russell showed how Tennessee women, both black and white, worked for suffrage from the 1870s until the final passage of the federal amendment in 1920, when the Tennessee state legislature approved the Nineteenth Amendment by one vote, **adding** woman suffrage to the U.S. Constitution. Holly J. McCammon, Karen E. Campbell, Ellen M. Granberg, and Christine Mowery studied state suffrage movements from 1866 to 1919, asking how suffragists were able to win suffrage in twenty-nine states before ratification of the federal suffrage amendment in 1920. These scholars argued that "gendered opportunity structures" gave women access to political power outside formal political structures. Genevieve G. McBride dealt with woman's rights in Wisconsin. Such local and state efforts, repeated over and over again, help explain the strength of the national movement.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁹ Robert J. Chandler, "In the Van: Spiritualists as Catalysts for the California Women's Suffrage Movement," *California History* 73 (Fall 1994); Roger Levenson, *Women in Printing: Northern California, 1857-1890* (Santa Barbara, California: {{publisher?}} 1994); Linda Van Ingen, "The Limits of State Suffrage for California Women Candidates in the Progressive Era," *Pacific Historical Review* 73, no. 1 (2004).

⁴⁰⁰ Gayle Gullett, *Citizens: The Emergence and Development of the California Women's Movement, 1880-1911* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

⁴⁰¹ Samuel J. Tamburro, "Frances Jennings Casement and the Equal Rights Association of Painesville, Ohio: The Fight for Women's Suffrage, 1883-1889," *Ohio History* 108 (1999): 162-76; Jennifer Ross-Nazzari, "Emma Smith Devoe and the South Dakota Suffrage Campaigns," *South Dakota History* 33, no. 3 (2003): 235-62; Janette C. Russell, "The Perfect Thirty-Six: Tennessee and the Woman Suffrage Movement," *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 49 (1995): 238-42; Holly J. McCammon et al., "How Movements Win: Gendered Opportunity Structures and U.S. Woman's Suffrage Movements, 1866 to 1919," *American Sociological Review* 66, no. 1 (2001): 49-70; Genevieve G. McBride, ed.,

Although these studies do not relate directly to the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention, they do suggest the impact of ideas discussed at Seneca Falls as woman's suffrage and woman's rights played out in communities, states, and the nation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although most of the signers of the Declaration of Sentiments came from a relatively small area in central New York, the ideas they promoted were in tune with the national imagination. As Seneca Falls signers moved west, they took an active part in the woman's rights movement across the country.

Rebecca J. Mead drew many of these local studies together into a major analysis of the western woman suffrage movement, *How the Vote Was Won: Woman Suffrage in the Western United States, 1868–1914* (2004). In contrast to Gullet's emphasis on organized womanhood in California, Mead argued that the western suffrage movement rejected the elitist approach of easterners. Western women, she argued, productively united middle-class and working-class supporters (including European American, African American, and Hispanic women, male politicians, and women reformers) into a coalition that successfully brought woman suffrage to Wyoming (1869), Utah (1870), Colorado (1893), Washington (1910), California (1911), Oregon (1912), and Arizona (1912), Nevada (1914), and Montana (1914). As Mead summarized her work,

This study establishes western precocity as the result of the unsettled state of regional politics, the complex nature of western race relations, broad alliances between suffragists and farmer-labor-progressive reformers, and sophisticated activism by western women. . . . It argues that the last generation of activists, often educated and professional women, employed modern techniques and arguments that invigorated the movement and helped meliorate class tensions. Stressing political and economic justice for women and deemphasizing prohibition persuaded increasing numbers of wary urban voters and weakened the negative influence of large cities. Thus, understanding woman suffrage in the West reintegrates this important region into national suffrage history and helps explain the ultimate success of this radical reform.⁴⁰²

After passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, women began to explore their new role as voting and office-holding citizens. The old National American Woman Suffrage Association became the new League of Women Voters. The new National Woman's Party began to lobby for an Equal Rights Amendment, introduced at Seneca Falls in 1923.

Christine Lunardini in *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights: Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party* (1986) treated the period after 1920 from the perspective of feminists in the National Woman's Party who kept the Equal Rights Amendment alive from 1923 forward. Oral history played a role in documenting this period. Through oral histories, both Robert S. Gallagher and Amelia R. Fry documented Alice Paul's key role.⁴⁰³

General Biographical Works

Women's Wisconsin: From Native Matriarchies to the New Millennium (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 2005).

⁴⁰² Rebecca J. Mead, *How the Vote Was Won: Woman Suffrage in the Western United States, 1868–1914* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

⁴⁰³ Christine Lunardini, *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights: Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party, 1910–1928* (New York: New York University Press, 1986); Robert Gallagher, "I Was Arrested, Of Course," *American Heritage* (February 1974): 17–18; Amelia R. Fry, "Alice Paul and the ERA," *Organization of American Historians Newsletter* 11, no. 1 (1983): 13–16.

From the nineteenth century to the present, biographies have been a productive avenue into women's history. A sign of increasing public interest in women's history has been the proliferation of popular studies of women, including Cokie Roberts, *Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation* (2004), which focused on women in the revolutionary period, and Jean H. Baker, *Sisters: The Lives of America's Suffragists* (2005). Baker addressed the lives of Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Frances Willard, and Alice Paul.⁴⁰⁴

Biographies of Signers of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments

Several biographers treated the Seneca Falls convention directly. Biographies of signers of the Declaration of Sentiments include the following:

Frederick Douglass. Frederick Douglass was a supporter of woman's rights all his adult life. Waldo E. Martin Jr., in *The Mind of Frederick Douglass* (1984), argued that "no aspect of his [Douglass'] woman's rights cause meant more to him than his pivotal support of woman's right to vote at the Seneca Falls convention." Any study of Douglass must begin with his own writings, and several editions of these are available. John W. Blassingame, Peter P. Hinks, and John McKigan's collection of Douglass' papers contains all three of his autobiographies, the first written in 1845, when he was only twenty-seven, the last written in his seventies. C. Peter Ripley, *Black Abolitionist Papers*, contains many letters by Douglass. Philip Foner, *Douglass on Women's Rights* (1976), explored Douglass' commitment to the woman's rights movement. William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (1995), is a key biography. Maria Diedrich, in *Love Across Color Lines: Ottilie Assing and Frederick Douglass* (2000), detailed the relationship between Douglass and this German journalist. Explorations of Douglass as a national figure in Civil War politics include David Blight's *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* reprint (1991) and James Oakes' *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics* (2007).⁴⁰⁵

Hunt Family. With the exception of Judith Wellman's brief biographical sketches of Richard P. Hunt and Jane Hunt in *The Road to Seneca Falls* and online, little recent work has been done on the Hunt family. Brief biographical material appeared in *History of Seneca County* (1876) and also in John Becker, *History of Waterloo* (1949). In 1999, Chad G. Randl prepared an extensive report on Hunt's landholding. Anne Derousie, historian at Women's Rights National Historical Park, is currently working on a detailed study of the Hunt family.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁴ Cokie Roberts, *Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004); Jean H. Baker, *Sisters: The Lives of America's Suffragists* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005).

⁴⁰⁵ John W. Blassingame, Peter P. Hinks, and John McKigan, eds., *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series Two: Autobiographical Writings*, vol 1 (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1999); C. Peter Ripley et al., *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 1-5 (University of North Carolina Press, 1985-92); Waldo E. Martin Jr., *The Mind of Frederick Douglass* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 147-48; Philip Foner, ed., *Douglass on Women's Rights* (1976; repr. New York: DaCapo, 2001); William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995); Maria Diedrich, *Love Across Color Lines: Ottilie Assing and Frederick Douglass* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000); David Blight, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* reprint (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991); James Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007).

M'Clintock Family. Historians are now beginning to recognize what contemporaries already knew: that although Mott was the best-known speaker at the Seneca Falls convention, the M'Clintocks were clearly the most important organizers, aside from Stanton herself. Mott recognized this oversight, noting in 1855, "I have never liked the undeserved praise in the Report of that Meeting's Proceedings, of being 'the moving spirit of that occasion,' when to thyself [Stanton] belongs the honor, aided so efficiently by the M'Clintocks—." In 1890, Giles B. Stebbins, himself affiliated with the Congregational Friends, wrote a brief anecdotal sketch of Thomas M'Clintock in *Upward Steps of Seventy Years*. Thomas Mumford, who knew the family in Waterloo, wrote a lengthy obituary for Thomas M'Clintock in *The Christian Register*, March 25, 1876.⁴⁰⁷

Early works on the Congregational Friends (later called the Progressive Friends, or Friends of Human Progress) also referred briefly to the M'Clintocks. Albert J. Wahl's 1951 dissertation included a brief reference to Thomas M'Clintock as the author of *The Basis of Religious Association*, the founding document of the Congregational Friends. The work of Christopher Densmore and Nancy Hewitt gave much background about the context in which the M'Clintocks operated.⁴⁰⁸

No recent biography of Thomas M'Clintock has yet appeared, but in 1999, recognizing renewed awareness of the national importance of the M'Clintocks, Christopher Densmore and Judith Wellman wrote an entry on the M'Clintock family for *American National Biography*.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁶ Judith Wellman, *Road to Seneca Falls*, 186–89; "Signers of the Declaration of Sentiments," www.nps.gov/wori/historyculture/; *History of Seneca County* (Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign & Everts, 1876), reprinted by W.E. Morrison, 1976, opposite p. 81, 83–6; John E. Becker, *A History of the Village of Waterloo* (Waterloo, New York: Waterloo Library and Historical Society, 1949), 156; "In Memoriam," *Waterloo Observer*, June 21, 1876; *Friends' Intelligencer* 13 (1857), 569; Chad G. Randl, *Richard P. Hunt: Leader in Waterloo Real Estate and Business, Prepared for the Women's Rights National Historic Park* (Seneca Falls, New York: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1999).

⁴⁰⁷ Mott to Stanton, 16 March 1855, in Beverly Palmer, ed., *Selected Letters of Lucretia Coffin Mott* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2002), 233–36; Giles B. Stebbins, *Upward of Seventy Years* (New York: John W. Lovell, 1890), 70–71; [Thomas Mumford], *The Christian Register*, March 25, 1876. Thanks to Christopher Densmore for finding this source.

⁴⁰⁸ *Friends' Historical Association Bulletin* 59 (1970): 106–12; Hugh Barbour, Christopher Densmore, et al., eds., *Quaker Crosscurrents: Three Hundred Years of Friends in the New York Yearly Meetings* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995). In this volume, Nancy Hewitt and others focused on issues relating to women, 165–82; Christopher Densmore, "The Quaker Tradition: Sustaining Women's Rights," National Women's Studies Association, 1998, <http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/units/archives/urr/>; Christopher Densmore, "Quaker History and Woman's Rights Tour, Friends General Conference Gathering at Rochester, New York, July 3–5, 2000," unpublished typescript; Christopher Densmore, "The Dilemma of Quaker Anti-Slavery: The Case of Farmington Quarterly Meeting, 1836–1860," *Quaker History* 82, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 80–91; Christopher Densmore, "Quaker Comeouters and the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention of 1848," unpublished paper, Conference on New York State History, June 4–5, 1993; A. Day Bradley, "Progressive Friends in Michigan and New York," *Quaker History* 52 (Autumn 1963): 95–101; Wahl, "The Congregational or Progressive Friends and the Pre-Civil War Reform Movement"; Hewitt, "The Fragmentation of Friends," 93–108.

⁴⁰⁹ Christopher Densmore and Judith Wellman, "The M'Clintock Family," in *American National Biography* 15 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 148–49.

The most detailed recent study of the M'Clintocks focuses not on Thomas M'Clintock but on Elizabeth M'Clintock Phillips, the oldest daughter in the family. Andrea Constantine Hawkes' 2005 dissertation, "The Life of Elizabeth M'Clintock Phillips, 1821–1896: A Story of Family, Friends, Community, and A Self-Made Woman," is a thoroughly researched, balanced study, detailing the important role that M'Clintock played not only in the Seneca Falls convention but also in challenging the boundaries of woman's roles in the years after the convention. She developed a political friendship with Stanton, Hawkes argued, that presaged Stanton's better-known alliance with Anthony. After M'Clintock's marriage in 1852, she became less active politically, but in her later life, she forged a new role as an entrepreneur in Philadelphia and a suffrage activist in Vineland, New Jersey.⁴¹⁰

Lucretia Mott. Margaret Hope Bacon, *Valiant Friend: The Life of Lucretia Coffin Mott* (1980), dealt with Seneca Falls from the perspective of Lucretia Mott. Beverly Wilson Palmer's *Selected Letters of Lucretia Coffin Mott* (2002) is the single best edition of these primary sources. Dana Greene edited *Lucretia Mott: Her Complete Speeches and Sermons* (1980).⁴¹¹

Amy Post. Nancy Hewitt's article on Amy Post (1984) is the single best source on this key abolitionist and woman's rights organizer. The "Post circle," as Garrisonian William C. Nell referred to their household, was the anchor for much radical activity in central New York, and Amy Post's spirit infused much of the antislavery, Underground Railroad, and woman's rights activity throughout this whole region, as well as nationally.⁴¹²

Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Elizabeth Cady Stanton left Seneca Falls to become one of the most influential women in U.S. history, and several scholars have written full-length biographies of her life. All have relied heavily on Stanton's own autobiography, *Eighty Years and More*, published in 1898. Stanton's memoirs are a lively and engaging reflection emphasizing two major themes of her life: woman's rights and religion.

As Ann Gordon has suggested, "Stanton never intended that her reminiscences be *the* evidence for establishing her historical significance. Rather, she took advantage of how well known she was to the public after fifty years as a lecturer, frequent writer, and historian." Much of what we know about Stanton must therefore come from other sources, including Stanton's articles in the 1850s in *The Lily*, her article on woman's rights in 1868 in *Eminent Women of the Age*, her lectures after the Civil War, sections of the first three volumes of *History of Woman Suffrage* (1881, 1882, 1886), her reminiscences published in *The Woman's Tribune* from 1889 to 1892; and her letters. In 1991, Pat Holland and Ann Gordon published all of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony's extant letters and writings in microfilm. From 1997 to 2003, Ann Gordon edited selections of the Stanton-Anthony papers in hard copy. These two modern editions have made it possible, for the first time, to sort out Stanton's writings in a thorough and careful way.⁴¹³

⁴¹⁰ Hawkes, "The Life of Elizabeth McClintock Phillips."

⁴¹¹ Margaret Hope Bacon, *Valiant Friend: The Life of Lucretia Coffin Mott* (New York: Walker and Company, 1980); Beverly Wilson Palmer, ed., *Selected Letters of Lucretia Coffin Mott* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Dana Greene, ed., *Lucretia Mott: Her Complete Speeches and Sermons* (New York: Edmund Mellon Press, 1980).

⁴¹² Nancy A. Hewitt, "Amy Kirby Post" *University of Rochester Library Bulletin* 37 (1984).

⁴¹³ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Eighty Years and More* (1898) Reprint (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993); Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage* (1881, 1882, 1886); Theodore Tilton, "Elizabeth Cady Stanton," in *Our Famous Women*, ed. Laura Curtis Bullard, 613–14; James Parton, *Eminent Women of the Age* (1868); Ann Gordon, "Afterword," *Eighty Years and More* (1898,

Historians who dealt with Elizabeth Cady Stanton have had to confront one very serious problem. Although it appears on its surface to be a straightforward historical document, *Eighty Years and More*, like all of Stanton's writings, was written with a paramount political purpose: to promote the woman's rights movement. As Estelle C. Jelinek, Ann Gordon, and others have noted, Stanton used her personal experience to promote her political ideas. With anecdotes from her own life, Stanton transformed woman's rights, a threatening concept to many Americans, into ideas that were accessible to ordinary women.⁴¹⁴

Given that purpose, as Gordon has noted, Stanton "often rewrote her memories, sometimes turning familiar stories on their head, giving them nearly opposite meanings." Dates, for example, meant little to Stanton. In one description of her speech to the 1854 New York State legislature (which she never actually delivered in person, but instead gave in printed form to each legislator), Stanton dated the event, as Gordon noted, as 1840, 1846, and 1848 but not 1854. "What matters ultimately," suggested Gordon, "is not, apparently, whether she recalls events accurately, represents her father fairly, records details correctly, but whether she conveys to people the complicated tensions over fathers, husbands, law, and public behavior that accompanied the advent of women's rights." Her memories were "like a string of beads," Stanton noted in *Eighty Years*, "held together by a fine thread of argument and illustration."⁴¹⁵

After her death, Stanton's children compounded the problem by editing both her letters and her autobiography. Harriot Stanton Blatch and Theodore Stanton literally cut out pieces of Stanton's letters, pasting sections of different letters together as if they were one, omitting parts of her autobiography and adding others, and publishing the whole in 1922 in two volumes as *Elizabeth Cady Stanton as Revealed in Her Letters, Diary and Reminiscences*.⁴¹⁶

In 1940, eighteen years after publication of Stanton and Blatch's edited collection of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's letters and autobiography, Alma Lutz, member of the National Woman's Party and friend of Harriot Stanton Blatch, wrote the first full-length biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. *Created Equal: A Biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* was based on careful primary research and remains a readable and reliable resource. Eleanor Flexner's *Century of Struggle* appeared in 1959. Her treatment of Stanton relied on Lutz's perspective and remained the most influential work for many years. In 1974, Alma Lutz wrote the entry for Elizabeth Cady Stanton in *Notable American Women*.⁴¹⁷

repr. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), 469; Patricia Holland and Ann Gordon, eds., *The Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, Microform (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1991); Ann, Gordon, ed., *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, 4 vols. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997–2003).

⁴¹⁴ Estelle C. Jelinek, *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present* (Boston: Twayne, 1986); Ann Gordon, "Afterward," *Eighty Years and More*, Reprint (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993).

⁴¹⁵ Ann Gordon, "Afterward," *Eighty Years and More*, 475–76; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Eighty Years*, 308, quoted in Gordon, "Afterword," 476.

⁴¹⁶ Theodore Stanton and Harriot Stanton Blatch, eds., *Elizabeth Cady Stanton as Revealed in Her Letters, Diary and Reminiscences* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1922); Amy Dykeman, "'To Pour Forth from My Own Experience': Two Versions of Elizabeth Cady Stanton," *The Journal of the Rutgers University Libraries* XLIV:1 (June 1982).

⁴¹⁷ Alma Lutz, *Created Equal: A Biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (New York: The John Day Company, 1940); Flexner, *Century of Struggle*; Alma Lutz, "Elizabeth Cady Stanton," in *Notable American Women*, eds. Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer (Cambridge,

In 1980, Lois W. Banner produced the first full-length Stanton biography of the second wave of feminism, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton: A Radical for Women's Rights* (1980). Written as part of the biography series for Little, Brown, her book reached a wide popular and college audience with solid information about Stanton. Working more closely with primary sources, although without the benefit of the completed edition of the Stanton-Anthony papers, Elisabeth Griffith produced *In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (1984), tied in part to social learning theory. This work remained the standard biography of Stanton into the early twenty-first century. In 1990, the *Heath Anthology of American Literature* (1990), edited by Paul Lauter, published a brief biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Seneca Falls convention, with an introduction by Judith Wellman.⁴¹⁸

Ellen Carol DuBois has dealt extensively with Stanton's intellectual legacy, beginning with *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Woman's Movement in America, 1848-1869* (1978). In 1981, DuBois published a collection of Stanton's writings in *The Elizabeth Cady Stanton-Susan B. Anthony Reader*. She continued her discussion in "Outgrowing the Compact of the Fathers: Equal Rights, Woman Suffrage, and the United States Constitution, 1820-1878" in 1987 and *Remembering Seneca Falls, 1848: Honoring the Women Who Paved the Way: An Essay* (1998). Key essays appeared in 1998 in *Woman Suffrage and Women's Rights*.⁴¹⁹

Not until the publication of the microfilm version of Stanton and Anthony's letters (1991), edited by Pat Holland and Ann Gordon, followed by selected documents in the hard copy edition (1997-2003), edited by Ann Gordon, did scholars have a dependable baseline of documentary evidence from which to work.⁴²⁰

Release of the Ken Burns video in 1998, *Not for Ourselves Alone*, coincided with the 150th anniversary of the Seneca Falls convention. Publication of the companion volume by Geoffrey Ward and Ken Burns in 1999 helped promote interest in the Stanton-Anthony partnership, especially in the later years of the nineteenth century. Also in 1999, Barbara Goldsmith, *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull* brought a sympathetic perspective to Stanton's involvement with Victoria Woodhull and debates about free love. In 2001, Kathi Kern focused on Stanton's 1895 publication of *The Woman's Bible*, a collection of biblical references to women that Stanton edited. Kern also included references to Stanton's early life, based on primary sources relating both to Johnstown and Troy, New York. Notably, Kern identified Black Peter, Stanton's friend from her girlhood, enslaved in the Cady household. In 2004, Judith Wellman

Massachusetts: Belknap Press / Harvard University Press, 1974), 3:342-47.

⁴¹⁸ Lois Banner, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton: A Radical for Woman's Rights* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980); Elisabeth Griffith, *In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Judith Wellman, "Elizabeth Cady Stanton," *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, vol. 1, ed. by Paul Lauter (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath, 1990).

⁴¹⁹ Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Woman's Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1978); *Elizabeth Cady Stanton-Susan B. Anthony Reader* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1981); DuBois, "Outgrowing the Compact of the Fathers: Equal Rights, Woman Suffrage, and the United States Constitution, 1820-1878," *Journal of American History* 74, no. 3 (1987): 836-62; *Remembering Seneca Falls, 1848: Honoring the Women Who Paved the Way: An Essay*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America / Radcliffe College, 1998).

⁴²⁰ Patricia Holland and Ann Gordon, eds., *The Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*. (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1991). Microform; Ann Gordon, ed., *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, 5 vols. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997-2006).

dealt in detail with Stanton's life up to 1848 in *The Road to Seneca Falls: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the First Woman's Rights Convention*.⁴²¹

Several articles and dissertations explored Stanton's contribution to women's rights from a wide variety of perspectives. Joseph E. Ryan emphasized the importance of Stanton's early religious training, her marriage, and her friendship with Lucretia Mott in preparing her for leadership at the Seneca Falls convention. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner showed how Stanton emerged from the early influence of evangelical religion to become a religious revolutionary, tracing her development by analyzing writings such as "The Slave's Appeal," *The Revolution*, *The History of Woman Suffrage*, and *The Woman's Bible*. Roberta J. Park noted Stanton's importance as a role model for emphasizing women's physical health, both in dress reform and exercise. Phyllis Cole explored Stanton's debt to Margaret Fuller, particularly Fuller's influence on Stanton's speaking and writing style.⁴²²

Lisa Tetrault's dissertation on Stanton, Anthony, and *History of Woman Suffrage* explored the way in which Stanton and Anthony organized *History of Woman Suffrage* to create Seneca Falls as an origin story for the woman's rights movement and to elevate Anthony's importance in the early years of the movement. Andrea Constantine Hawkes looked at Elizabeth M'Clintock's relationship with Stanton.⁴²³

Martha Wright. In 2004, Sherry H. Penney and James D. Livingston, one of Martha Wright's descendants, wrote the first full-length biography of Martha Wright, sister of Lucretia Mott. *A Very Dangerous Woman: Martha Wright and Women's Rights* intertwines the story of Wright's personal journey as independent thinker, witty young woman, wife, and mother and her life as an abolitionist and woman's rights activist as she moved from Boston to Philadelphia to Pensacola, Florida, and then to Aurora and Auburn, New York. Along with an earlier article, "Expectant at Seneca Falls," this book points out the importance of Wright's Quaker upbringing in influencing her woman's rights activities. Not only was she one of those who helped write the call for the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention. She also went on to become a consistent leader at state and national woman's rights meetings until her death in 1875. Livingston and Penney detailed Wright's contribution to Seneca Falls, including the source of the "humorous article from a newspaper, written by Martha C. Wright," and read at the convention. This was "Hints for Wives," first published in 1846 in the *United States Gazette*.⁴²⁴

⁴²¹ Geoffrey Ward and Ken Burns, *Not for Ourselves Alone: The Story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony* (New York: Knopf, 1999); Barbara Goldsmith, *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull* (New York: Perennial, 1999); Kathi Kern, *Mrs. Stanton's Bible* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001); Wellman. *Road to Seneca Falls*.

⁴²² Joseph E. Ryan, "Prelude to Seneca Falls: An Analysis of Elizabeth Cady Stanton Prior to the Convention," *New England Journal of History* 52, no. 1 (1995): 21–27; Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner "Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Reformer to Revolutionary: A Theological Trajectory," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 3 (1994): 673–97; Roberta J. Park, "All the Freedom of the Boy: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Nineteenth-Century Architect of Women's Rights," *International Journal of the History of Sport* (Great Britain) 18, no. 1 (2001): 7–26; Phyllis Cole, "Stanton, Fuller, and the Grammar of Romanticism," *New England Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (2000): 533–59.

⁴²³ Tetrault, "Memory of a Movement"; Hawkes, "Life of Elizabeth McClintock Phillips,"

⁴²⁴ Sherry H. Penney and James D. Livingston, *A Very Dangerous Woman: Martha Wright and Women's Rights* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2003), 78–79; Sherry Penney and James D. Livingston, "Expectant at Seneca Falls," *New York History* 84 (Winter 2003): 33–49.

Collective Biographies. Picking up a theme initiated by Ross Evans Paulson, scholars began to look more closely at the circumstances of the convention itself through collective biographers of the signers. Judith Wellman studied the one hundred people (sixty-eight women and thirty-two men) who signed the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments, finding that they acted in the context of the passage of the Married Woman's Property Act in April 1848 and that they belonged to one of two major abolitionist networks, the emerging Free Soil Party in Seneca Falls or the newly forming Congregational Friends, a group of Quaker dissidents who lived in Waterloo, Rochester, and elsewhere. First published in the *Journal of Women's History* and republished in Linda Kerber and Jane DeHart, *Women's America*, this article was subsequently reprinted in a Japanese-language edition.⁴²⁵

Christopher Densmore began to explore the Quaker background of many of these signers, outlining the development of the Congregational Friends (later Progressive Friends, and Friends of Human Progress) in western New York, Ohio, southeastern Pennsylvania, and elsewhere. In "Origin Stories," Nancy Hewitt emphasized that "these radical universalists demonstrate the deep and abiding concern among many abolitionist-feminists with events and ideas throughout the Atlantic World." Peggy Brase Siegel has identified a similar movement in Indiana, which attracted Quaker abolitionists and woman's rights activists.⁴²⁶

Other Woman's Rights Leaders

The following discussion focuses primarily on leaders active before 1870, but there are a few exceptions for people who had some special relationship to Seneca Falls or to Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Susan B. Anthony. A resurgence of interest in Susan B. Anthony, friend and co-worker of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and one of the leaders of the woman's rights movement for more than fifty years, has yet to produce the kind of sustained and consistent attention from a variety of scholars that Anthony merits. Kathleen Barry, a sociologist, published *Susan B. Anthony: A Biography of a Singular Feminist* (1988), the first full-length biography of Anthony since Katherine Anthony, *Susan B. Anthony: Her Personal History and Her Era* (1954). Ruth Rosenberg-Napersteck, city of Rochester historian, highlighted Anthony's role in the city in her 1995 article, "Failure Is Impossible: The Legacy of Susan B. Anthony." Beverly Beeton and G. Thomas Edwards discussed Anthony's impact on converting western public opinion to suffrage in "Susan B. Anthony's Woman Suffrage Crusade in the West" (1982). They argued that, in her four lecture trips west (1871, 1877, 1895, and 1896), the last when she was

⁴²⁵ Judith Wellman, "The Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention: A Study of Social Networks," *Journal of Women's History* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 9–37. Reprinted in Linda Kerber and Jane DeHart, eds., *Women's America*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) and in Japanese edition, 2000.

⁴²⁶ Christopher Densmore, "The Dilemma of Quaker Anti-Slavery: The Case of Farmington Quarterly Meeting, 1836–1860," *Quaker History* 82 (Fall 1993): 2; Christopher Densmore, "Quaker Comeouters and the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention of 1848," unpublished paper, Conference on New York State History, June 4–5, 1993; "The Quaker Tradition: Sustaining Women's Rights." National Women's Studies Association, 1998, <http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/units/archives/urr/>; Nancy A. Hewitt, "Origin Stories: Remapping First Wave Feminism," "Sisterhood and Slavery: Transatlantic Antislavery and Women's Rights," Proceedings of the Third Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University, October 25–28, 2001; Peggy Brase Siegel, "Moral Champions and Public Pathfinders: Antebellum Quaker Women in East Central Indiana," *Quaker History* 81, no. 2 (1992): 87–106.

seventy-six years old, Anthony experienced a change in attitude from western politicians, ministers, and editors, who reviled her broad woman's rights ideas in 1871 and began to respect and support her more limited demands for suffrage by the 1890s. In 1994, Lynn Sherr and Jurate Kazickas published *Susan B. Anthony Slept Here: A Guide to American Women's Landmarks*, and in 1996, Lynn Sherr followed this work with *Failure Is Impossible: Susan B. Anthony In Her Own Words*, helping to make Susan B. Anthony accessible to a popular audience. Release of the Ken Burns video in 1998, *Not for Ourselves Alone*, and publication of the companion volume by Geoffrey Ward and Ken Burns generated interest in the Stanton-Anthony partnership. The best work on Susan B. Anthony's trial for voting is Ann Gordon, "Teaching Judicial History: Federal Trials and Great Debates in United States History, The Trial of Susan B. Anthony," with an excellent overview of the trial and its importance to legal history and public opinion, including a collection of documents and bibliography.⁴²⁷

Beecher Family. From Catherine Beecher (whose conservative stance acted as a foil to the woman's rights movement in the 1830s), to Harriet Beecher Stowe (whose authorship of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* made her, in Lincoln's words, the "little woman who caused the Civil War"), to Isabella Beecher Hooker (friend and ally of Stanton, Anthony, and the National Woman Suffrage Association), to Henry Ward Beecher (perhaps the best-known minister in the nineteenth century, pastor of Plymouth Congregational Church in Brooklyn, New York, at the center of the Beecher-Tilton sex scandal, which embroiled Stanton and the National Woman Suffrage Association), the Beecher family dominated discussions of woman's rights throughout the nineteenth century. Katherine Kish Sklar's *Catherine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (1976) was part of a new look at the whole Beecher family. Jeanne Boydston, Mary Kelley, and Anne Margolis, looked at all the Beecher sisters and their relationship to woman's rights in *The Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women's Rights and Woman's Sphere* (1988). Ann Farman argued that Isabella Beecher Hooker viewed woman's rights activism as a female equivalent to male ministry in "Woman Suffrage as an Alternative to the Beecher Ministry" (1976).⁴²⁸

Antoinette Brown Blackwell. Elizabeth Cazden, in her 1983 book, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell: A Biography*, noted that, in 1848, when both Lucy Stone and Antoinette Brown were students at Oberlin College, they reactivated the Ladies Literary Society, meeting at the

⁴²⁷ Kathleen Barry, *Susan B. Anthony: A Biography of a Singular Feminist* (New York: New York University Press, 1988); Katherine Anthony, *Susan B. Anthony: Her Personal History and Her Era* (New York: Doubleday, 1954); Ruth Rosenberg-Napersteck, "Failure Is Impossible: The Legacy of Susan B. Anthony," *Rochester History* 57, no. 4 (1995): 1-28; Beverly Beeton and G. Thomas Edwards, "Susan B. Anthony's Woman Suffrage Crusade in the West," *Journal of the West* 21, no. 2 (1982): 5-15; Lynn Sherr and Jurate Kazickas, *Susan B. Anthony Slept Here: A Guide to American Women's Landmarks* (Three Rivers Press, 1994); Lynn Sherr, *Failure Is Impossible: Susan B. Anthony In Her Own Words* (Three Rivers Press, 1996); Geoffrey Ward and Ken Burns, *Not for Ourselves Alone: The Story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony* (New York: Knopf, 1999); Ann Gordon, "Teaching Judicial History," http://www.fjc.gov/history/anthony.nsf/autoframe?openform&header=/history/anthony.nsf/page/header_home&nav=/history/anthony.nsf/page/nav_home&content=/history/anthony.nsf/page/home.

⁴²⁸ Katherine Kish Sklar, *Catherine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976); Jeanne Boydston, Mary Kelley, and Anne Margolis, *The Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women's Rights and Woman's Sphere* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Ann Farman, "Woman Suffrage as an Alternative to the Beecher Ministry: The Conversion of Isabella Beecher Hooker," in *Portraits of a Nineteenth Century Family: A Symposium on the Beecher Family*, eds. Earl A. French and Diana Royce (Hartford, Connecticut: Stowe-Day Foundation, 1976).

home of an African American woman, to train themselves in public speaking. One of their discussion topics was a report on the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention.⁴²⁹

Alice Stone Blackwell. Daughter of Lucy Stone and a major woman's rights activist in her own right, Alice Stone Blackwell kept a diary in the 1870s, edited by Marlene Deahl Merrill, *Growing Up in Boston's Gilded Age: The Journal of Alice Stone Blackwell, 1872-74* (1990).⁴³⁰

Mary Ann Shadd Cary. As editor of the *Provincial Freeman* in Ontario, Canada, from 1854 to 1859, Cary influenced the development of abolitionism in the United States and Canada. She also promoted woman's rights. Jane Rhodes wrote a biography of her in the context of African American newspapers, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century* (1999).⁴³¹

Lydia Maria Child. As an author and editor, Lydia Maria Child was one of the most influential abolitionists and woman's rights supporters of the nineteenth century, from her first novel in 1825, about a marriage between a white woman and an Indian man, through her advice books to women and her editorship of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, her writings reached reformers throughout the country. She frequently published letters and minutes relating to the M'Clintocks and the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society. Two biographies of Child appeared in the 1990s, Deborah Pickman Clifford, *Crusader for Freedom: A Life of Lydia Maria Child* (1992), and Carolyn L. Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child* (1994).⁴³²

Abby Kelley Foster. Abby Kelley Foster's visits to Seneca Falls and upstate New York in 1842 and 1843 reinvigorated Garrisonian abolitionism in the region and set the stage for the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention five years later. Dorothy Sterling highlighted Foster's work in *Ahead of Her Time: Abby Kelley Foster* (1991). Glen Altschuler and Ian Saltzgaber produced an edited transcript of the trial of Rhoda Bement, who faced opposition from the Seneca Falls Presbyterian Church for her support of Abby Kelley's 1843 speech in Seneca Falls, in *Revivalism, Social Conscience, and Community in the Burned-over District: The Trial of Rhoda Bement* (1983). The Worcester Women's History Project also helped promote Abby Kelley's work.⁴³³

Matilda Joslyn Gage. As an ally of Stanton and Anthony, Gage helped write *History of Woman Suffrage* and maintained the ongoing work of the National Woman Suffrage Association. Mary E. Paddock Corey, in "Matilda Joslyn Gage: Woman Suffrage Historian, 1852-1898" (1995), presented a biography of Gage, one of the most important but often forgotten woman's rights leaders, from the time she first began her public career in 1852 until her death. Leila R. Brammer emphasized the extent of Gage's omission from the history of the woman's rights movement, based in part on her commitment to liberal religion, in

⁴²⁹ Elizabeth Cazden, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell: A Biography* (New York: Feminist Press, 1983).

⁴³⁰ Marlene Deahl Merrill, *Growing Up in Boston's Gilded Age: The Journal of Alice Stone Blackwell, 1872-74* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990).

⁴³¹ Jane Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

⁴³² Deborah Pickman Clifford, *Crusader for Freedom: A Life of Lydia Maria Child* (Boston: Beacon, 1992); Carolyn L. Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1994).

⁴³³ Dorothy Sterling, *Ahead of Her Time: Abby Kelley Foster* (New York: Norton, 1991); Glen Altschuler and Ian Saltzgaber, *Revivalism, Social Conscience, and Community in the Burned-over District: The Trial of Rhoda Bement* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983).

Excluded from Suffrage History: Matilda Joslyn Gage, Nineteenth Century American Feminist (2000). Sally Roesch Wagner has republished Gage's major work, *Woman, Church, and State*, along with many of Gage's essays.⁴³⁴

William Lloyd Garrison. William Lloyd Garrison, friend of Stanton, the M'Clintocks, and Hunts and nationally renowned as the pacifist abolitionist editor of *The Liberator*, visited Seneca Falls and Waterloo at least twice (in 1842 and May 1851), staying with both the M'Clintocks and the Stantons. Henry Mayer's monumental biography of Garrison, *All on Fire* (2000), details the life of one of the most influential abolitionists in U.S. history.⁴³⁵

Abby Hopper Gibbons. Margaret Hope Bacon's biography *Abby Hopper Gibbons: Prison Reformer and Social Activist* (2000) details the life of Quaker abolitionist, feminist, and prison reformer Abby Hopper Gibbons. Gibbons, daughter of radical New York City abolitionist printer Isaac Hopper, did not join the Ladies New York Anti-Slavery Society because it refused to admit African American women as members. Instead, she joined the short-lived Manhattan Anti-Slavery Society, whose members were almost entirely black, and turned her energies toward prison reform and social activism. These activities kept her out of a leadership role in the emerging woman's rights movement in the 1840s.⁴³⁶

Mary Grew. Ira V. Brown, *Mary Grew: Abolitionist and Feminist (1813–1896)* (1991) covered details of the life of this key Philadelphia abolitionist-feminist, one of the women who attended the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840.⁴³⁷

Grimké Sisters. Raised in a slave-owning family, Sarah and Angelina Grimké converted to abolitionism in the 1830s and then became early woman's rights advocates and important influences on Stanton and every other major woman's rights leader. Stanton sent her children to their school in the 1850s. Exceptionally well written, Gerda Lerner's classic biography, *Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Rebels Against Slavery* (1967) highlighted the lives of these two pivotal women. Katherine DuPre Lumpkin also wrote a biography of Angelina Grimké in 1974. Mark Perry wrote *Lift Up Thy Voice: The Grimké Family's Journey from Slaveholders to Civil Rights Leaders*. In 1998, Gerda Lerner came back to the topic of the Grimkés with *The Feminist Thought of Sarah Grimké* (1998). Larry Ceplair's edition of *The Public Years of Sarah and Angelina Grimké: Selected Writings, 1835–1839* (1989) made an extremely useful contribution to scholarship on the Grimkés, supplementing the early edition of Weld-Grimké letters edited by Gilbert Barnes. Recently, scholars have focused on each of the sisters separately. In 2003, Pamela R. Durso published a collection of writings from Sarah Grimké, *The Power of Woman: The Life and Writings of Sarah Moore Grimké*, quoting liberally from her early diaries as well as from her writings on abolitionism and woman's rights. In 1998, Gerda Lerner published *The Feminist Thought of Sarah Grimké*. Charles Wilbanks edited *Walking by Faith: The Diary of Angelina Grimké, 1828–1835* (2003).

⁴³⁴ Mary E. Paddock Corey, "Matilda Joslyn Gage: Woman Suffrage Historian, 1852–1898" (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 1995); Leila R. Brammer, *Excluded from Suffrage History: Matilda Joslyn Gage, Nineteenth Century American Feminist* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2000); Sally Roesch Wagner, ed., Matilda Joslyn Gage, {{Gage is author? Not clear}} *Woman, Church, and State* (Amherst, Massachusetts: Humanity Books, 2002).

⁴³⁵ Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000).

⁴³⁶ Margaret Hope Bacon, *Abby Hopper Gibbons: Prison Reformer and Social Activist* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).

⁴³⁷ Ira V. Brown, *Mary Grew: Abolitionist and Feminist* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1991).

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. Several scholars have recently looked at Frances E.W. Harper. As a key actor in the National Woman Suffrage Association, her life brought together a focus on abolitionism, the rights of free people of color, and woman's rights. She was the first black woman to make her living as a novelist, poet, and lecturer; in fact, she was the most popular black poet of the nineteenth century. Recent studies include Margaret Hope Bacon, "One Great Bundle of Humanity" (1989); *Complete Poems of Frances E.W. Harper*, Maryemma Graham, (1988); Frances Smith Foster, *A Brighter Coming Day: A Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Reader* (2006); and Melba Joyce Boyd, *Discarded Legacy: Politics and Poetics in the Life of Frances E.W. Harper, 1825–1911* (1984).⁴³⁸

Harriet Jacobs. In 1987, Jean Fagan Yellin published *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, showing that this book, written under the pseudonym of Linda Brent, edited by Lydia Maria Child, and once thought to be a novel, was in fact the autobiography of a real woman, Harriet Jacobs, who had escaped from slavery in Edenton, North Carolina. Yellin followed this work in 2004 with *Harriet Jacobs: A Life*. Harriet Jacobs lived for a time with Declaration of Sentiments signer Amy Post in Rochester.⁴³⁹

Samuel J. May. In his 1991 biography, *Samuel Joseph May and the Dilemmas of the Liberal Persuasion, 1797–1871*, Donald Yacovone argued that May "helped shape the antebellum woman's rights movement." May's 1845 tract, *The Rights and Condition of Woman*, was "the first written by an American minister," and May "routinely used his pulpit to attack the country's inflexible definitions of gender," Yacovone wrote. Although May did not attend the Seneca Falls convention, he worked closely with the M'Clintocks and others in forming the utopian socialist community in Skaneateles, New York, visited the M'Clintocks in Waterloo, and took a leading role in the rescue of William "Jerry" Henry (who had escaped from slavery in Missouri to live in Syracuse, New York) in October 1851. May advocated woman's suffrage as early as 1845, argued that Jesus embodied "as much of the feminine, as he did the masculine character," worked for the rights of poor and working women, advocated dress reform, opened his pulpit to feminists such as Antoinette Brown Blackwell and women freedom seekers such as Oneida E. Day, and supported Stanton and Anthony.⁴⁴⁰

Clarina I.H. Nichols. In "The Forgotten Feminist of Kansas," Joseph G. Gambone produced informative material on this early abolitionist and woman's rights lecturer, who worked closely with Stanton and Anthony. Diane Eickhoff, *Revolutionary Heart: The Life of Clarina Nichols and the Pioneering Crusade for Women's Rights* (2006) documented Nichols in this first full-length biography, following her move from Vermont to Kansas and then to California.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁸ Margaret Hope Bacon, "'One Great Bundle of Humanity': Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825–1911)," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 113, no. 1 (1989): 21–43; *Complete Poems of Frances E.W. Harper*, ed. Maryemma Graham (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Frances Smith Foster, *A Brighter Coming Day: A Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Reader* (New York: Feminist Press, 2006); Melba Joyce Boyd, *Discarded Legacy: Politics and Poetics in the Life of Frances E.W. Harper, 1825–1911* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1984).

⁴³⁹ Jean Fagan Yellin, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987); Jean Fagan Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

⁴⁴⁰ Donald Yacovone, *Samuel Joseph May and the Dilemmas of the Liberal Persuasion, 1797–1871* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1991).

⁴⁴¹ Joseph G. Gambone, ed., "The Forgotten Feminist of Kansas: The Papers of Clarina I.H. Nichols, 1854–1885," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 39 (1973): 12–57, 220–61, 392–444, 515–63; 40 (1974): 72–135,

Mary Gove Nichols. Jean L. Silver-Isenstadt, in *Shameless: The Visionary Life of Mary Gove Nichols* (2002), showed how Nichols combined a commitment to women's rights with an emphasis on sexual liberation, water cures, and physical health. She and her second husband, Thomas Nichols, founded a school, became spiritualists, and then converted to Catholicism. Thomas Nichols' 1854 book on marriage liberally quoted the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments.⁴⁴²

Parker Pillsbury. Stacey M. Robertson shows the extent to which woman's rights ideals had an impact on some male reformers in this full-length biography, *Parker Pillsbury: Radical Abolitionist, Male Feminist* (2000).⁴⁴³

Harriet Hanson Robinson. Claudia L. Bushman published "A Good Poor Man's Wife": *Being a Chronicle of Harriet Hanson Robinson and Her Family in Nineteenth-Century New England* (1981), a biography of this former mill girl who became an important author, speaker, and supporter of Stanton, Anthony, and the National Woman Suffrage Association.⁴⁴⁴

Ernestine Rose. Ernestine Rose, whose work on a married woman's property act in New York State was a precursor to the Seneca Falls convention, worked extensively with Anthony and Stanton in the woman's rights movement after Seneca Falls. Carol A. Kolmerton wrote the most recent full biography of Ernestine Rose, *The American Life of Ernestine L. Rose* (1999). Born to a Jewish family in 1810 in Piotrkow, Poland, Ernestine Louise Potoski moved to England to become part of the Owenite movement (whose adherents advocated equality and social justice for all, including working people and women). She married fellow reformer William Rose and moved with him to New York City in 1836.⁴⁴⁵

Maria W. Stewart. Marilyn Richardson, in *Maria W. Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer* (1987) incorporated a lengthy introduction about Stewart with an edited collection of her writings and speeches, providing an excellent overview of her life. Stewart was not simply America's first black woman political writer but America's first female native-born public speaker.⁴⁴⁶

Lucy Stone. In 1992, Andrea Moore Kerr published *Lucy Stone: Speaking Out for Equality*, the first full-length biography of Stone since Elinor Rice Hays' work in 1961. Kerr introduced the Seneca Falls convention in the context of Stone's own work as "the only woman in the nation making a career of lecturing on woman's rights." Kerr suggested that the organizers of the Seneca Falls convention "vastly underestimated the interest in woman's rights that had been growing steadily throughout the decade" and noted that Stanton

241–92, 410–59, 503–62; Diane Eickhoff, *Revolutionary Heart: The Life of Clarina Nichols and the Pioneering Crusade for Women's Rights* (New York: Quindaro, 2006).

⁴⁴² Jean L. Silver-Isenstadt, *Shameless: The Visionary Life of Mary Gove Nichols* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

⁴⁴³ Stacey M. Robertson, *Parker Pillsbury: Radical Abolitionist, Male Feminist* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2000).

⁴⁴⁴ Claudia L. Bushman, "A Good Poor Man's Wife": *Being a Chronicle of Harriet Hanson Robinson and Her Family in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1981).

⁴⁴⁵ Carol A. Kolmerton, *The American Life of Ernestine L. Rose* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999).

⁴⁴⁶ Marilyn Richardson, ed., *Maria W. Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

proposed engaging Lucy Stone as a lecturer for their cause, although the two did not meet until three years later.⁴⁴⁷

Joelle Million, *Woman's Voice, Woman's Place: Lucy Stone and the Birth of the Woman's Rights Movement* (2003) argued for the importance of Lucy Stone's work as a pioneer woman's rights advocate in the decade before Seneca Falls, giving balance and context to the traditional Stanton-Anthony story of Seneca Falls. Million downplayed the significance of Seneca Falls even more than Kerr, introducing it only briefly at the end of a lengthy paragraph that began with the sentence, "As Stone built a network of supporters among New England reformers, several influences combined to create a favorable climate for her new crusade," and concluded that "several weeks later, antislavery women of western New York held two woman's rights conventions, one in Seneca Falls and the other in Rochester, and began circulating woman suffrage petitions."⁴⁴⁸

Million viewed Stanton's role within the woman's movement as relatively limited in the early 1850s. "Although Stanton had been the main force behind the Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Convention in 1848," Million argued, "when Stone met her in the spring of 1853 she was neither a major figure in the movement nor widely known outside New York. . . . After a brief flicker of activism in 1848 she had retreated to domesticity."⁴⁴⁹

Carol Lasser and Marlene Deahl Merrill published *Friends and Sisters: Letters between Lucy Stone and Antoinette Brown Blackwell, 1846-93* (1987). Stone and Blackwell were fellow students at Oberlin College, as well as friends, and sisters-in-law. Leslie Wheeler edited letters between Stone and her husband Henry Blackwell in *Loving Warriors: Selected Letters of Lucy Stone and Henry B. Blackwell, 1853-1893* (1981).⁴⁵⁰

Mary Church Terrell. Born into slavery in 1863, Mary Church Terrell became one of the most active African American leaders of the woman suffrage movement in the early twentieth century and one of the most visible to European American suffragists. She spoke in Seneca Falls at the sixtieth anniversary of the Seneca Falls convention in 1908. In spite of her importance, she has received very little biographical attention. One of the very few recent discussions of her life is Beverly Washington Jones' dissertation, "Quest for Equality: The Life of Mary Eliza Church Terrell, 1863-1954" (1980).⁴⁵¹

Sojourner Truth. Three recent biographies have appeared about this remarkable spiritual leader, abolitionist, and woman's rights activist: Carlton Mabree with Susan Mabree Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* (1993); Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (1996); and Erlene Stetson and Linda David, *Glorying in Tribulation: The Lifework of Sojourner Truth* (1994). Ironically, although Truth's 1851 speech at the woman's rights convention in Akron, Ohio, "Ar'n't I a Woman?" has been prolifically quoted, both Mabree and Painter argued convincingly that Truth never used this phrase. It was

⁴⁴⁷ Andrea Moore Kerr, *Lucy Stone: Speaking Out for Equality* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 52-53.

⁴⁴⁸ Million, *Woman's Voice, Woman's Place*, 99.

⁴⁴⁹ Million, *Woman's Voice, Woman's Place*, 143.

⁴⁵⁰ Carol Lasser and Marlene Deahl Merrill, *Friends and Sisters: Letters between Lucy Stone and Antoinette Brown Blackwell, 1846-93* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Leslie Wheeler, ed., *Loving Warriors: Selected Letters of Lucy Stone and Henry B. Blackwell, 1853-1893* (New York: Dial, 1981).

⁴⁵¹ Beverly Washington Jones, "Quest for Equality: The Life of Mary Eliza Church Terrell, 1863-1954" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1980).

instead an invention of Frances Dana Gage, who reported a version of Truth's speech in an 1863 account. Other biographies of Sojourner Truth included Jacqueline Bernard, *Journey Toward Freedom: The Story of Sojourner Truth* (1967; repr. 1990) and Victoria Ortiz, *Sojourner Truth: A Self-Made Woman* (1974).⁴⁵²

Harriet Tubman. Although best known as an icon of the Underground Railroad, Harriet Tubman also worked with Anthony and the National American Woman Suffrage Association after the Civil War. More books have appeared about Harriet Tubman than almost any other American woman. More than 125 books were in print in the early twenty-first century, but most of these were children's books, reworking information from Sarah Bradford's as-told-to biographies of Tubman in the nineteenth century or Earl Conrad's 1943 biography. In 2003 and 2004, three new scholarly biographies of Tubman appeared. Jean Humez created a collection of primary sources relating to Tubman and her life in *Harriet Tubman: The Life and the Stories* (2003). Catharine Clinton wrote *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom* (2004). Incorporating new primary sources from local records and recreating detailed family genealogies, Kate Clifford Larson produced *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero* (2004). Tubman's relationship to the woman's movement, particularly her relationship to Anthony, the Empire State Federation of Woman's Clubs (which paid for her gravestone), and Mary Talbert (club woman, feminist, and civil rights activist) deserves further exploration.⁴⁵³

Victoria Woodhull. Victoria Woodhull's appearance at the nexus of woman suffrage and free love in the early 1870s embroiled Stanton, Anthony, and the National Woman Suffrage Association in a national debate over woman's proper role. Little solid scholarly work was available about Woodhull until Barbara Goldsmith wrote *Other Powers* (1999), a thoroughly researched and extremely well-written biography.

Women and Community/Social History

In the 1990s, historians and local activists began to highlight the importance of women's activism at the community level. John F. McClymer, in *This High and Holy Moment: The First National Woman's Rights Convention, Worcester, 1850*, presented a collection of documents relating to the first national woman's rights convention in Worcester, Massachusetts. In 2000, the Worcester Women's History Project reenacted the convention itself and developed a model community women's history program, including a women's history tour, slide show, traveling exhibit, web site, and reenactment of Abby Kelley Foster's life by Lynne McKenney Lydick.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵² Carlton Mabree, with Susan Mabree Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* (New York: New York University Press, 1993); Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996); Erlene Stetson and Linda David, *Glorying in Tribulation: The Lifework of Sojourner Truth* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994); Jacqueline Bernard, *Journey Toward Freedom: The Story of Sojourner Truth* (1967; repr., New York: Feminist Press, 1990) and Victoria Ortiz, *Sojourner Truth: A Self-Made Woman* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1974).

⁴⁵³ Sarah Bradford, *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* (1869; repr. Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1971); Sarah Bradford, *Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People* (repr. New York: Corinth Books, 1961); Earl Conrad, *Harriet Tubman: Negro Soldier and Abolitionist* (New York: International Publishers, 1942); Jean Humez, *Harriet Tubman: The Life and the Stories* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003); Catharine Clinton, *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom* (New York: Little, Brown, 2004); Kate Clifford Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004).

Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797–1840*, presented a remarkable study of women's organizations and female leaders, across classes and races, in New York City and Boston in the early years of the nineteenth century, that definitively shatters the once-standard interpretation of linear progress from benevolent reform to antislavery to women's rights. "For benevolent or reformist women," Boylan concluded, "organizational involvement expressed values, views, and commitments; it seldom changed them." Public/private distinctions in this period were "continually under construction and constantly shifting," argued Boylan. Although these women organized outside the home, their work "resided rhetorically in the 'private' arena, even when it involved highly visible political and economic activity." Furthermore, these voluntary associations

served and extended the interests of the powerful, often at the expense of the powerless. . . . And why should they not? Women's identities as women are and were simultaneous with and usually inseparable from their ethnic, racial, class or other identities. What is perhaps surprising is that in the 1830s small groups of radical reformers imagined that it could be otherwise.⁴⁵⁵

Boylan reinforced the discontinuity between benevolent reformers and woman's rights activists. As noted earlier in Section I, early woman's rights activists, including those who organized the Seneca Falls convention, came from different backgrounds than many of those who organized most of the female voluntary organizations. Involvement in women's organizations per se did not lead to woman's rights commitment. Neither evangelical women nor urban women formed the cutting edge of the women's rights movement, as some historians had earlier argued.

In fact, rural women were likely to be the movement's strongest and earliest supporters, as Lori Ginzberg emphasized in *Untidy Origins: A Story of Woman's Rights in Antebellum New York*. Focusing on a remarkable petition to the 1846 New York constitutional convention from six women in Jefferson County, Ginzberg studied the social context of this grassroots commitment to voting rights for women. Eleanor Vincent, Lydia A. Williams, Lydia Osborn, Susan Ormsby, Amy Ormsby, and Anna Bishop based their case entirely on a natural rights argument rooted in the Declaration of Independence, claiming that

the present government of this state has widely departed from the true democratic principles upon which all just governments must be based by denying to the female portion of the community the right of suffrage and any participation in forming the government and laws under which they live. . . . Your Memorialists therefore ask your honorable body, to remove this just cause of complaint, by modifying the present Constitution of this State, so as to extend to women equal, and civil and political rights with men.

In her elegantly written volume, Ginzberg combined social and intellectual history "to underscore the histories of ideas as they emerge from the experiences (personal, local, and national) of actual people." She described "how people, shaped by their particular

⁴⁵⁴ John F. McClymer, *This High and Holy Moment: The First National Woman's Rights Convention, Worcester, 1850*, (Fort Worth, Texas: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999); Lynn McKenney Lydick, <http://www.wwhp.org/Activities/>.

⁴⁵⁵ Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797–1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 3, 12, 13.

communities, time, and place, have an idea, chew it over, say it aloud, and prod it onto the path of debate and action.”⁴⁵⁶

Judith Wellman, *The Road to Seneca Falls: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the First Woman's Rights Convention*, was the first full-length scholarly treatment of the Seneca Falls convention. It combined a biography of Stanton up to 1848 with a consideration of the convention's social, cultural, and community context. Three themes in Stanton's life (legal reform, antislavery, and woman's rights) connected to major issues in the wider culture. In Seneca Falls in 1848, Stanton brought people and ideas together in a unique combination that resulted in the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention.⁴⁵⁷

At a grassroots level, many Americans shared a worldview that incorporated ideals of equality for men and women. These ideals survived, protected by rural isolation from the intimidation of state-imposed conflicting legal and political dictates. Among groups that emphasized local decision making (such as Quakers, Congregationalists, some Baptists, and Wesleyan Methodists), both social structures and religious values reinforced gender equality. Woman's rights advocates from these religious groups often quoted biblical references such as “God created man in his own image, male and female created he them,” (*Genesis* 1) or “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” (*Galatians* 3:28). Such ideals were also sustained by a practical, everyday egalitarian lifestyle, in which the economic and family contributions of women were as essential to survival as were those of men. Finally, New York State retained remnants of Dutch law (based on Roman law left over from the seventeenth-century Dutch settlement of New York), which gave women legal rights missing from English common law.

The Seneca Falls convention tapped into these grassroots egalitarian values. Because Seneca Falls reformers used the words of the Declaration of Independence and publicized their convention through the popular press, they projected their own local worldview onto the national stage. There it became part of the larger debate about the nature of democracy and citizenship itself. Egalitarian ideas about women moved from a local to a cosmopolitan arena, where they continued to be debated by Americans into the twenty-first century.

Seneca Falls and New Audiences, 1995–2007

Inspired in part by the 75th anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1995 and the 150th anniversary of the Seneca Falls convention in 1998, the general public renewed its interest in the early woman's rights movement, and historians reached out to new audiences. In 1996, for example, Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor gave a speech in Phoenix, Arizona, “The History of the Women's Suffrage Movement,” highlighting Seneca Falls as the first woman's rights convention, while the University of Rochester presented an exhibit on upstate New York and the early woman's rights movement.⁴⁵⁸

The *Kentucky Law Journal* published a series of articles devoted to “The Sesquicentennial of the 1848 Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention: American Women's Unfinished Quest for Legal, Economic, Political, and Social Equality.” Arguing that “the

⁴⁵⁶ Lori D. Ginzberg, *Untidy Origins: A Story of Woman's Rights in Antebellum New York* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 5.

⁴⁵⁷ Wellman, *Road to Seneca Falls*.

⁴⁵⁸ Sandra Day O'Connor, “The History of the Women's Suffrage Movement,” *Vanderbilt Law Review* 49 (April 1996); [Mary Huth], *Upstate New York and the Women's Rights Movement* (Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Libraries, Department of Rare Books, Special Collections, and Preservation, 1995), <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/rbk/women/women.htm>.

Declaration of Sentiments was the earliest, systematic, public articulation in the United States of the ideas that fuel the quest for women's economic, political, social, and legal equality to this day," the authors of these articles explored "contemporary aspects of problems that were first identified in the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments."⁴⁵⁹

Celebrate '98, the sesquicentennial celebration of the 1848 convention also brought national attention to Seneca Falls. Women's Rights National Historical Park sponsored a major national conference, with First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton as the main speaker. Thousands of visitors attended the opening ceremonies. National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" did a story on the convention, as did Dallas public radio. Vivien Rose, from Women's Rights National Historical Park, noted that the event provided an opportunity for a multitude of voices to be heard. Unlike earlier commemorations, no one group owned the story. "Instead," Rose noted, "Celebrate '98 and the park provided places for the discussion of many perspectives on the meaning and importance of the 1848 Convention." Presenters included the National Organization for Women, AFL-CIO, Coalition for Lesbian Visibility, Feminists for Life, Girls '98, and Forum '98, representing 110 national women's organizations. Free speech permits were given for impromptu demonstrations.⁴⁶⁰

Ken Burns reached public television audiences across the country with a major full-length film on the lives of Stanton and Anthony, *Not for Ourselves Alone*, with a companion book by Geoffrey Ward.⁴⁶¹

Also in 1998, the National Conference on Public History featured a symposium on Seneca Falls. Vivien Rose suggested that all of the commemorations of Seneca Falls had been organized by women, who to promote their own versions of the meaning of the Seneca Falls convention, as well as to highlight contemporary issues. Molly Murphy MacGregor noted that not all Americans reacted positively to the Seneca Falls convention, even in 1998. The National Women's History Project encountered resistance from the media and from the Post Office, which refused to issue a commemorative stamp. Ann Gordon noted that earlier commemorations of Seneca Falls celebrated its intentions rather than its accomplishments. In 1998, however women's history was alive and well, but the political movement that sustained it had lost much of its energy. Ellen Carol DuBois was more optimistic, viewing the sesquicentennial as a chance to use women's history to create popular interest in women's issues.⁴⁶²

The 1990s also saw renewed public interest in sites relating to women's history throughout the country. Inspired in part by the leadership of Vivien Rose, historian of Women's Rights National Historical Park; Dwight Pitcaithley, chief historian of the National Park Service; and like-minded historians and administrators in the Organization of American Historians, the American Historical Association, the National Council for Public History, and the National Park Service, museum interpreters, archivists, and historic site

⁴⁵⁹ Carolyn S. Bratt, "The Sesquicentennial of the 1848 Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention: American Women's Unfinished Quest for Legal, Economic, Political, and Social Equality," *Kentucky Law Journal* (Summer 1995/1996): 715.

⁴⁶⁰ Vivien Rose, "Seneca Falls Remembered: Celebrations of the 1848 First Women's Rights Convention," *CRM* 21:11 (1999), 9-15.

⁴⁶¹ Ken Burns and Geoffrey C. Ward, *Not For Ourselves Alone: The Story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999).

⁴⁶² Vivien Rose, Molly Murphy McGregor, Ann Gordon, and Ellen Carol DuBois, "Seneca Falls Goes Public," *Public Historian* 21, no. 2 (1999): 41-47.

administrators began to focus more specifically on women's history. In connection with women's historic sites, the National Park Service sponsored three conferences on women and historic preservation in the mid-1990s. Women's Rights National Historical Park held another conference in Seneca Falls, focusing on women and material culture. In 2000, Christopher Densmore created a path-breaking tour of sites related to Quaker and women's rights history in central New York, including those related to the Seneca Falls convention.⁴⁶³

Several publications also focused on interpreting women's history in public spaces, including the National Park Service, *Exploring a Common Past* (1998); Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, and Gail Lee DuBrow and Jennifer B. Goodman, *Restoring Women's History through Historic Preservation* (2002), which contained an essay by Judith Wellman on the creation of Women's Rights National Historical Park and another by Carol Shull, "Searching for Women in the National Register of Historic Places."⁴⁶⁴

New resources also became available for students and teachers. Beth Savage's work with the National Register's "Teaching with Historic Places" was an exceptionally important link between historic sites and the classroom. The lesson plan on the M'Clintock house, part of Women's Rights National Historical Park, is a model for women's rights sites.⁴⁶⁵

In the 1990s, a variety of Web sites emerged relating to women's history, many of which dealt at least partly with Seneca Falls. One of the most important was the Women and Social Movements web site, sponsored by Binghamton University (New York) and Alexander Street Press. Directed by Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, this site presented primary documents organized around historical questions relating to women from the colonial period to 2000. By 2003, the site had about one thousand primary sources and attracted about twelve thousand hits a month from people in ninety countries. Carol Faulkner and Beverly Wilson Palmer created a section titled "How Did Lucretia Mott Combine Her Commitments to Antislavery and Women's Rights, 1840-1860?" James Livingston and Sherry H. Penney organized a section around Martha Wright and her relationship with her slaveholding relative, William Pelham, brother of her first husband. Gretchen Becht and Kathryn Kish Sklar asked "Why Did Some Men Support the Women's Rights Movement in the 1850s, and How Did Their Ideas Compare to Those of Women in the Movement?"⁴⁶⁶

The State University of New York at Oswego and Syracuse University, under the direction of Judith Wellman, Joanne Silverstein, and Blythe Bennet, created *Roads from Seneca Falls*. Funded by the New York State Department of Education, this project collected

⁴⁶³ Conferences were held at the University of Arizona, Tempe; Mt. Vernon College in Washington, D.C.; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Christopher Densmore, "Quaker History and Woman's Rights Tour, Friends General Conference Gathering at Rochester, New York, July 3-5, 2000," unpublished typescript, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College.

⁴⁶⁴ National Park Service, *Exploring a Common Past* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1998, rev. 2003); Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997); Carol D. Shull, "Searching for Women in the National Register of Historic Places," and Judith Wellman, "It's a Wide Community Indeed: Alliances and Issues in Creating Women's Rights National Historical Park, Seneca Falls, New York," in *Restoring Women's History through Historic Preservation*, eds. Gail Dubrow and Jennifer Goodman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

⁴⁶⁵ "The M'Clintock House: A Home to the Women's Rights Movement," www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/76mclintock/76mclintock.htm.

⁴⁶⁶ *Women and Social Movements* is available by subscription from Alexander Street Press through many university and public libraries,

Web-based resources relating to women's history for teachers and students from kindergarten through high school. It received more than half a million hits in its first six months of operation. Many of these resources referred specifically to Seneca Falls and woman's suffrage.⁴⁶⁷

Accessible Archives created an online searchable database of newspapers, including papers relating to African Americans and women. Cornell University and the University of Michigan cooperated in the *Making of America*, which contains published material from the nineteenth century. The Library of Congress put many collections relating to woman's rights online through its *American Memory* site.

Scholarly Assessments of Seneca Falls: A Clear Consensus

Scholars in the late twentieth century, like earlier historians and activists, viewed Seneca Falls as the first woman's rights convention and the beginning of the woman's rights movement. Alice Rossi, editor of *The Feminist Papers: From Adams to de Beauvoir* (first published in 1973 and still in print) called it "the first woman's rights meeting in American history." Christine Bolt, in her 1993 book, *The Women's Movements in the United States and Britain from the 1790s to the 1920s*, called the Seneca Falls convention "the first feminist assembly." Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin noted that "the women's rights movement, born in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, took more than seventy years to achieve its goal of woman suffrage, making it the longest-lived continuous social movement in U.S. history." In her survey of women's history in 1994, Nancy Woloch called Seneca Falls the "first convention" of women's rights advocates. In 1995, Sylvia Hoffert, emphasizing women's public speaking in *When Hens Crow: The Woman's Rights Movement in Antebellum America*, called Seneca Falls and its Declaration of Sentiments "the first organized attempt to build on previous individual efforts . . . to create an idiom through which women could express themselves politically as a group."⁴⁶⁸

In 1998, Jean Mathews called Seneca Falls "the first convention ever called to agitate the rights of women." Matthews suggested that

Seneca Falls marked a qualitative step forward in the evolution of the Woman Question. Earlier feminist statements had been the work of individuals, speaking and writing as individuals. Now a group of women were organizing as a collectivity and producing a group statement that invited public assent. The Seneca Falls convention and those that followed provided a focus for inchoate discontent, and gave many women who were brooding over their inferior position and lack of opportunities not only the realization that they were not alone or odd, but they could actually do something about it. No formal organized national

⁴⁶⁷ Nancy Cott, Gerda Lerner, Kathryn Kish Sklar, Ellen DuBois, Nancy Hewitt, "Considering the State of U.S. Women's History," *Journal of Women's History* 15, no. 1 (2003); *Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600-2000*, womhist.alexanderstreet.com/; *Roads from Seneca Falls*, www.roadsfromsenecafalls.net.

⁴⁶⁸ Alice Rossi, ed., *The Feminist Papers: From Adams to de Beauvoir* (New York: Bantam, 1973), 241; Christine Bolt, *The Women's Movements in the United States and Britain from the 1790s to the 1920s* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 87; Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, *Women and Power in American History*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Prentice Hall, 2001), 3; Sylvia Hoffert, *When Hens Crow: The Woman's Rights Movement in Antebellum America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 4.

society, with constitution and dues, emerged from Seneca Falls, but from 1848 onward there was something that could be called a women's movement in America.⁴⁶⁹

As Linda Kerber and Jane DeHart noted in *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*, "Many people in the 1830s and 1840s had begun to criticize the way American law and custom defined gender relations. The 1848 *Declaration of Sentiments* gathered these complaints into a manifesto and offered an agenda for change that would shape a women's rights movement deep into our own time." In 2000, Michael Goldberg, in *Breaking New Ground, 1800–1848*, called Seneca Falls the "first official step toward liberation."⁴⁷⁰

In 1994, Gary Nash and editors of the National History Standards Task Force demonstrated the importance of Seneca Falls as an icon for democracy. In the *National Standards for United States History*, they referred to the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention six times, pointing to Seneca Falls as an example of how teachers could make history more inclusive.⁴⁷¹

For many, Seneca Falls became a synonym for the early woman's rights movement. To historians of the woman's rights movement, the importance of Seneca Falls seemed self-evident, and they used the term "Seneca Falls" as a kind of shorthand, a trademark, to encompass women's early activism. Miriam Gurko's *The Ladies of Seneca Falls: The Birth of the Woman's Rights Movement* exemplified this approach. Although titled *The Ladies of Seneca Falls*, this book begins with Mary Wollstonecraft and ends with the deaths of Stanton and Anthony in the early twentieth century.⁴⁷²

More than twenty years later, Virginia Bernhard and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese similarly titled their 1995 collection of documents on the early woman's rights movement *The Birth of American Feminism: The Seneca Falls Woman's Convention of 1848*. Although these documents ranged from the writings of the Grimké sisters to articles from the *Lily* and selections from woman's rights conventions in the 1850s, the central event in the book (and by implication in the early woman's rights movement itself) was the Seneca Falls convention. The convention was, Bernhard and Fox-Genovese wrote, "a pivotal point in the history of women in the modern world."⁴⁷³

In 2004, in *The Road to Seneca Falls: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the First Woman's Rights Convention*, Judith Wellman emphasized the local roots as well as the national impact of this convention. Sally McMillen emphasized the national importance of Seneca Falls as a turning point in *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement*, published in 2008. Seneca Falls "changed the way American society (and much of the Western world) thought about and treated women in the mid-nineteenth century," she argued. "It unleashed

⁴⁶⁹ Jean V. Matthews, *Women's Struggle for Equality: The First Phase, 1828–1876* (New York: Ivan R. Dee, 1998) 53, 59–60.

⁴⁷⁰ Linda Kerber and Jane DeHart, *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 201; Michael Goldberg, *Breaking New Ground*, vol. 4 of Nancy Cott, *No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 236.

⁴⁷¹ Gary Nash, *National Standards for United States History: Exploring the American Experience* (National Center for History in the Schools, 1994).

⁴⁷² Miriam Gurko, *The Ladies of Seneca Falls: The Birth of the Woman's Rights Movement* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), v–vi. James Albins, from the Mary Baker Eddy Library, used the term "trademark" to refer to Seneca Falls.

⁴⁷³ Virginia Bernhard and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, eds., *The Birth of American Feminism: The Seneca Falls Woman's Convention of 1848* (New York: Brandywine, 1995), ix.

a complicated, lengthy struggle that continues to this day. At Seneca Falls, for the first time, women and men gathered for the sole purpose of articulating female grievances and demanding women's equality." McMillen ended her discussion in 1890. By that time, although the nation had not yet adopted woman suffrage, "the seeds planted at Seneca Falls in 1848 had grown into a national women's movement that ultimately uplifted the lives of half this nation's population."⁴⁷⁴

If Seneca Falls was such a pivotal point, why had so few historians focused primarily on the convention itself? In 2003, in a round-table discussion summarizing the state of U.S. women's history in the early twenty-first century, Nancy Cott, Gerda Lerner, and Nancy Hewitt related this phenomenon to shifts in focus within the historical profession as a whole. Cott suggested that, after the early challenge of simply making women visible, historians of women had focused on three major themes: postmodernism, whiteness, and the question of "gender" vs. "women." Gerda Lerner observed a similar trend. Surveying 720 entries under "Current Scholarship" in the *Journal of Women's History*, Lerner concluded that the largest proportion (48 percent of the books and 58 percent of the articles) were in biography, literary studies, and cultural representation. "If women's agency and community work and organized activities and political struggles of the past are no longer of interest to women's history specialists, then how will we ground our knowledge of present and future social struggles?" Lerner asked.⁴⁷⁵

Abstract concepts of gender and cultural representation, derived from the influence of literary studies, do not immediately lend themselves to a closer look at the Seneca Falls convention. They do, however, suggest perspectives from which historians might begin to approach the convention in the future.

In this same discussion, Kathryn Kish Sklar emphasized the study of gender as "the study of both women and men," including the analysis of male-dominated social structures, the analysis of communities from the perspective of women of color, and the study of politics from the perspective of women's history. Ellen DuBois picked up on the last theme, suggesting that women's history enriched studies of both political culture and citizenship. Finally, Nancy Hewitt, looking specifically at the first wave of the woman's movement, challenged "any grand tradition or cumulative narrative of emancipation." Historians should pay "keen attention to racial, ethnic, class, and regional differences," she argued, incorporating "contemporary concerns of globalization, third-world feminism, and the international or at least transatlantic dimensions of women's activism."⁴⁷⁶

It is these themes—gender as the study of women and men; women's relationship to politics and citizenship; and the multiplicity of voices from women (and men) of color, working people, rural as well as urban women, western and southern as well as eastern women, and women around the world—that whole "gumbo ya ya" of multiple rhythms that occurs when everybody talks at once, as Elsa Barkley Brown suggested—that offer the most useful approach to the study of Seneca Falls.⁴⁷⁷

In this cacophony of voices, it remains our challenge to isolate the story of Seneca Falls, to hear the voices of those unique people who created the woman's rights convention on two hot days in July 1848, and to make, as Barkley Brown suggested, that "lyric stand

⁴⁷⁴ Wellman, *The Road to Seneca Falls*; McMillen, *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3, 8.

⁴⁷⁵ Nancy Cott, Gerda Lerner, Kathryn Kish Sklar, Ellen DuBois, and Nancy Hewitt, "Considering the State of U.S. Women's History," *Journal of Women's History* 15, no. 1 (2003): 145–63.

⁴⁷⁶ Cott, Lerner, Sklar, DuBois, Hewitt, "Considering the State of U.S. Women's History."

⁴⁷⁷ Barkley Brown, "What Has Happened Here," 297–98

alone and at the same time be in connection with all the other lyrics being sung.”⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁸ Barkley Brown, “‘What Has Happened Here:’ The Politics of Difference in Women’s History and Feminist Politics,” 297–98

CONCLUSIONS

Coming Back to Seneca Falls

Historians in the last decades of the twentieth century expanded the context for Seneca Falls, in terms of time, place, people, and events, and earlier and different woman's rights voices. At the same time, they affirmed the importance of Seneca Falls as the first woman's rights convention and the catalyst for the organized woman's rights movement. Woman's rights activists told this basic story of Seneca Falls at conventions before the Civil War; Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her co-workers solidified it after the Civil War; and historians repeated it in the twentieth century. This study has confirmed that essential narrative.

In the late twentieth century, historians began to focus once more on various aspects of the early woman's rights movement. This larger focus decentered the original story of Seneca Falls and allowed us to look at the convention from perspectives other than that of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. This approach expanded the repertoire to include a multiplicity of voices, harmonies, and rhythms, lending richness and complexity to what once seemed a simple melody. Historians discovered that people in many different places shared values that they (and we) might define as ideas of empowerment for women, including access to resources for women, decision-making power for women, and mutual respect between women and men. In short, Americans in many parts of the country held proto-woman's rights values. Seneca Falls turned these widespread but unfocused woman's rights ideals into the beginnings of an organized movement whose roots reached back far earlier than Seneca Falls and whose branches extended into the twenty-first century.

Research in the late twentieth century relating to Seneca Falls focused both on the context of the convention and its impact. Historians reached general consensus on some points, but they also opened up hypotheses for further work.

Context for Seneca Falls

The Seneca Falls convention initiated an organized woman's rights movement because it crystallized extensive interest in women's rights that preceded 1848, extending clearly for twenty years before Seneca Falls, with roots into the eighteenth century.

Two movements, abolitionism and legal reform, were especially important.

1. **Abolitionism:** This study confirmed the importance of abolitionism as a source of strategies and allies for the Seneca Falls convention and the early woman's rights movement.
 - a. The 1830s formed a key period for women's abolitionist organizing. Philadelphia women (who attended the 1833 organizing meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society and then organized the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society) and women who organized the national women's antislavery conventions in 1837, 1838, and 1839 in New York City and Philadelphia were especially important sources of woman's rights sentiment. People who later attended the Seneca Falls convention (such as Lucretia Mott, Margaret Pryor, and Elizabeth M'Clintock) attended one or more of these conventions.

- b. **The 1840s were an overlooked period of developing women's rights consciousness.** Most historians skipped lightly over the years from 1840 until the Seneca Falls convention in 1848. More recent work has begun to fill in details of this crucial period. The work of Abby Kelley Foster as she lectured throughout the Northeast with Frederick Douglass for the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1842 and 1843 had a profound impact on local and national awareness of woman's rights. In 1847, Lucy Stone initiated a new phase in the movement, when she announced that she would divide her lectures equally between abolitionism and woman's rights.
- c. **The connection between signers of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and national leaders among the American Anti-Slavery Society was very strong.** The story of Seneca Falls highlights the connection of these local reformers to leaders in the national movement, especially the Grimké, Lucretia Mott, Abby Kelley Foster, and William Lloyd Garrison. Seneca Falls signers, including Thomas M'Clintock, also played key roles in the American Anti-Slavery Society.
- d. **Political abolitionism was more important than earlier accounts suggested.** Many signers of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments had friends among both the Garrisonians/Quakers in the American Anti-Slavery Party and political abolitionists in the Liberty Party/Liberty League/Free Soil Party. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, for example, knew nonvoting Garrisonians/Quakers and political abolitionists. She found her strongest role models and allies among Quakers such as Lucretia Mott and also people such as Frederick Douglass and Gerrit Smith, who were forging their own path in the Liberty Party and then the Liberty League. This group had many supporters in upstate New York, based in a decade of development in Christian Union, or Free churches, in alliance with the old Liberty Party. After the Civil War, the woman suffrage movement had a major impact on political parties and constitutional development that affected the country as a whole.
- e. **Local and regional antislavery organizations mediated between national and local groups.** In terms of the Seneca Falls convention, chief among these organizations were regional antislavery and religious groups, such as the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society, the Congregational Friends, and women's groups that organized local antislavery fairs. Many signers of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments were active in these groups in the 1840s.
- f. **Early woman's rights leaders brought their ideas about woman's rights with them to the abolitionist movement.** People such as Angelina and Sarah Grimké, Lucy Stone, Lucretia Mott, Abby Kelley, Foster and Elizabeth Cady Stanton brought their woman's rights convictions with them when they entered the antislavery movement. They used abolitionist networks and methods to launch the woman's movement, but they already understood the importance of equality and self-respect for women. Abolitionism acted as a jumping off point for woman's rights activism. It helped translate existing woman's rights ideas into action.

2. Legal reform: Legal reform was a far more important influence on the organization of the Seneca Falls convention than has often been recognized. While we have no complete list of people in Seneca Falls who supported the Married Women's Property Act, we do have Stanton's testimony to suggest the widespread impact of debates about married women's property throughout New York State. Elizabeth Cady Stanton highlighted legal reform in *History of Woman Suffrage*. Passage of the first Married Woman's Property Act in New York State in April 1848 was a step, she wrote, "that impelled the rest of us to do and dare anything." We also know that Seneca Falls resident Ansel Bascom supported this reform at the 1846 New York State constitutional convention. (Bascom also attended the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention but did not sign the Declaration of Sentiments, perhaps because he was then a candidate for Congress.) The importance of legal reform in influencing people at Seneca Falls reinforces the work of Elizabeth Warbasse, Peggy Rabkins, and Norma Basch in connecting legal reform to the woman's movement in general.

Two other movements--for the rights of the free people of color and Native Americans--also influenced the nineteenth-century woman's rights movement.

1. African Americans and woman's rights: Free people of color, men as well as women, consistently supported the early woman's rights movement. Although Frederick Douglass was the only known African American at the Seneca Falls convention itself, he and others were in the forefront of the woman's movement, speaking at abolitionist conventions, woman's rights conventions, and black abolitionist conventions. Frederick Douglass and William C. Nell spoke at the Rochester convention in 1848. Jermain Loguen, freedom seeker from Tennessee, kept the main Underground Railroad station in Syracuse with his wife Caroline, and Loguen was vice-president of the second national woman's rights convention at Syracuse. Jeremiah Sanderson, friend of Amy Post, spoke out for woman's rights. Sojourner Truth, Frances E.W. Harper, and later, Harriet Tubman all spoke regularly at woman's rights conventions.

2. Native Americans and the early woman's rights movement: Several Quakers who attended the Seneca Falls convention actively worked with Seneca people, one of the six nations of the Haudenosaunee, in western New York. Stanton, Matilda Joslyn Gage, and other early woman's rights leaders were exposed to Haudenosaunee issues through newspapers, personal experiences, and, after the Civil War, through widespread discussions of matriarchal societies. European Americans in upstate New York were strongly aware of Haudenosaunee land claims after the American Revolution, and Quakers were at the center of successful organizing efforts to save Seneca lands in western New York and prevent a "trail of tears" for the Seneca people on a forced march west of the Mississippi River. After the Civil War, woman's rights activists—particularly Matilda Joslyn Gage—were strongly influenced by Haudenosaunee models of matrilineal societies.

Religious revivals and benevolent reform had a generally negative relationship to the Seneca Falls convention in particular and the early woman's rights movement in general.

1. Religious revivals: Revivals did not provide a positive link to the Seneca Falls woman's rights convention. The largest religious group of signers was affiliated

with the Congregational Friends, who explicitly rejected revivalism and emphasized instead the primacy of individual conscience, local decision making, “immediate response to divine requiring,” and “practical philanthropy.” Only one signer (S.E. Woodworth) came from the prorevival Baptist Church. The only signer affiliated with the Presbyterians (Delia Mathews) seems to have been part of the former Congregational core within this church, but she left the church with abolitionist and woman's rights advocate Rhoda Bement. The Methodist and Wesleyan Methodist churches were the only evangelical churches with any significant number of signers.

Religious influences on the early woman's rights movement were important and complex. It is appropriate neither to blame religion for all woman's problems (as did some woman's rights advocates) nor to attribute protofeminist ideas uniformly to religious revivals (as do some historians). Even among Quakers, egalitarian sentiments did not always translate into woman's rights activism. In terms of the early woman's rights movement, the most influential Quakers were the Congregational Friends who formed the cutting edge of the earliest woman's rights conventions. Up until the first national woman's rights convention, held in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1850, the first woman's rights conventions (in Seneca Falls, New York; Rochester, New York; and Salem, Ohio) were organized with strong support from Congregational Friends, as was the first state woman's rights convention in Pennsylvania. Other Friends, such as Orthodox Quaker J.C. Hathaway from Farmington, New York, temporary president of the Worcester convention, were also strong woman's rights advocates.

2. Benevolent reform: Benevolent reform activism did not provide a direct link to the Seneca Falls convention. Neither benevolent reform nor temperance proved the nursery that sprouted woman's rights activism. Many signers of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, had experience in the temperance movement and benevolent reform organizations. (Stanton's first speech was at a temperance meeting, and she taught a Sunday school for African American children, for example.) But woman's rights advocates found their strategies and allies from the abolitionist movement.

Biographies of leaders related to Seneca Falls and the early woman's rights movement lead to a more sophisticated understanding of their social backgrounds.

In the late twentieth century, historians wrote biographies of several people who attended the Seneca Falls convention, including Frederick Douglass, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth M'Clintock Phillips, Amy Post, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Martha Wright. Judith Wellman has also written a collective biography of the signers of the Declaration of Sentiments. The work of Pat Holland and Ann Gordon on the Stanton-Anthony papers and Beverly Wilson Palmer on the Lucretia Mott papers opened up new possibilities for scholarship on Seneca Falls and the early woman's rights movement. Themes that have emerged from biographical approaches include:

1. Slavery: Some signers and early woman's rights activists up in homes with people in slavery. As she was growing up, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, for example, saw slavery firsthand in her childhood home, which included three people in slavery.

2. Marriage relationships: Husband-wife ties were generally egalitarian and balanced by sibling ties. Women and men at Seneca Falls were nestled in family groups. What evidence we have suggests that married couples generally built egalitarian relationships. Wives and husbands also maintained strong and lasting

relationships with their families of origin. These extended family relationships linked nuclear families into a sustaining community network and made women into an essential part of the larger community. In this way, European American reform families had some similarities to traditional Native American families as well as to many traditional African families.

3. Men and woman's rights: Many men (both African American and European American) became early woman's rights supporters. The best-known male signer of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments was Frederick Douglass, but James Mott, Thomas M'Clintock, Richard P. Hunt, Jacob P. Chamberlain, Charles Hoskins, and many others were well known locally, regionally, and (in the case of M'Clintock and Mott) nationally. Thirty-two of the one hundred signers were male.

4. Urban vs. rural origins: Signers of the Declaration of Sentiments had rural roots but were connected to urban networks. Analysis of the signers at Seneca Falls suggests that they were people with rural identities, confirming Nancy Hewitt's conclusion that agrarian Quakers formed the cutting edge of woman's rights activism in upstate New York. Although rooted in a rural world, many woman's rights activists found success in a new urban environment. It was their position as a generation in transition from rural to urban lifestyles that gave them the need, the vision, and the power to promote reform.

5. Class and culture: Culture trumps class. While historians often acknowledge the importance of changing economic conditions as a background for the woman's rights movement, it seems clear that neither wealth nor work relationships were key to defining a commitment to woman's rights at Seneca Falls. Instead, abolitionist connections had more explanatory power than economic status.

E. Community Roots: Grassroots support across the Northeast and Midwest was important for sustaining the early woman's rights movement. A strong egalitarian ethic existed locally in many places, generating support for the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and the early woman's rights movement. This local woman's rights ethic was identified both with religious groups organized on a congregational form (including some Quakers and Congregationalists) and with revolutionary ideals associated with the Declaration of Independence.

F. International Reform Movements: The Seneca Falls convention occurred in the context of a ferment of revolutionary thought and action throughout Western Europe. Except for the World Anti-Slavery convention in London in 1840, however, this activity was not a direct cause of the Seneca Falls convention. Rather, all of it occurred as part of larger changes throughout the Western world. Much more work can be done on this topic, including studying connections with women outside the dominant western European cultures in the United States and influences on the U.S. from Asia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Impact of Seneca Falls

A. Americans recognized the Seneca Falls convention as the first woman's rights convention from 1848 onward. The story of the Seneca Falls convention was kept alive in virtually an unbroken line from initial press reports to pre-Civil War convention minutes to regular anniversary celebrations to historical writings in the twentieth century.

B. Whether historians defined politics narrowly or broadly, women played an active role in mainstream politics, and women's issues affected constitutional questions for the whole country. In Republican Party politics and in debates over the Constitution after the Civil War, women and women's issues played key roles.

C. Women and men associated with the Seneca Falls convention and other communities in central and western New York became important national woman's rights leaders, both in the Eastern and Western United States. Well-known leaders such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Frederick Douglass, and Lucretia Mott made western tours, but lesser known signers of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments (such as Catherine Fish Stebbins, Deborah Scott Crittenden, and Catherine Paine Blaine) also made contributions to the western suffrage movement, as did many other women from central and western New York (such as Susan B. Anthony and Caroline Seymour Severance).

D. While the organized suffrage movement after the Civil War focused on woman's right to vote, the larger ideals of woman's rights introduced in the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments were debated (and in many cases implemented) by other institutions in the late nineteenth century. Ideals espoused at Seneca Falls included the rights of women in education, work, politics, the law, family, religion, moral values, and personal respect. The development of women's colleges and coeducational schools, Progressive labor legislation for women, and the growth of religious movements such as spiritualism and Christian Science are only some examples of how these ideals affected the larger culture. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and other Seneca Falls reformers were very much part of these movements. Stanton sent her daughters to Vassar and Cornell, for example, called herself a socialist, and edited *The Woman's Bible*.

Seneca Falls and a Universalist Vision: Toward Complex Harmonies

Enriching our understanding of both the context and the impact of the Seneca Falls convention has helped better understand the importance of the convention as for the critical first step of the organized woman's rights movement.

As the site of the first woman's rights convention, Seneca Falls emerged from a set of unique historical circumstances, but it expressed a universal ideal: that all men and women are created equal. Nineteenth-century revolutions in transportation and industry created new communication networks, facilitated a rapid exchange of ideas, and brought people from various cultural backgrounds into central New York. In the context of European revolutions, the end of the United States–Mexican war, and events in abolitionism and legal reform, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, the Congregational Friends, Wesleyan Methodists, and Free Soil antislavery activists in Seneca Falls and Waterloo, New York, found themselves energized into action in 1848. The unique circumstances of this time and place allowed these “radical universalists,” as Nancy Hewitt has called them—infused with egalitarian worldviews sustained by religious, family, and reform networks—to challenge the legal and political inequalities of the new American republic.

Seneca Falls was important precisely because agitation for woman's equality had already generated considerable grassroots support across the Northeast and Midwest. In those two days of July 1848, the convention acted like a magnifying glass, focusing debate on issues that animated reform-minded Americans throughout the larger culture. In another time and place, with other people, the fire that burned into flame might well have smoldered for a long time, its embers tended by local reformers only. But this time and place was upstate New York in the United States in the spring of 1848, part of a Western world animated by revolution.

Some have argued that Seneca Falls was merely a local convention. The convention did attract primarily a local and regional audience. But local attendance was a function of the

convention's rapid organization, not of its importance. (Only ten days elapsed between writing the call for the convention on July 9 and the first day of the convention on July 19.)

The organizers of Seneca Falls acted in a national context, and the convention had a national impact. Many of the organizers at Seneca Falls were connected to national organizations, events, and leaders. Political abolitionists in Seneca Falls were organizing the new Free Soil Party and were well aware of their importance to this national movement. Quaker abolitionists, including the Hunts, M'Clintocks, and Posts, were leaders in the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society and the American Anti-Slavery Society. Elizabeth Cady Stanton—married to one of the nation's foremost political abolitionists (Henry B. Stanton), cousin to another (Gerrit Smith), and friend to national abolitionists such as the Grimké-Welds, William Lloyd Garrison, and Frederick Douglass—acted as a catalyst to bring both political and nonpolitical abolitionists together in the context of the debate over legal and political rights for women in New York State. The result was a locally organized meeting with national implications.

The Seneca Falls convention was the agent, and the Declaration of Sentiments was the key to this transformation into an organized women's movement. It was the genius of Stanton and the M'Clintocks, who wrote the Declaration of Sentiments, to use the words of the Declaration of Independence itself: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." These words spoke directly to the essential meaning of American citizenship.

Newspapers all over the country picked up the story of the convention, some to criticize and ridicule (one form of taking ideas seriously); some (including Horace Greeley of the *New York Tribune*) to endorse, however reluctantly; and some to embrace with enthusiasm. After Seneca Falls, people in dominant institutions of press, pulpit, and politics would ridicule, criticize, downplay, and laugh at woman's rights. But they would no longer ignore them.

Seneca Falls turned unfocused but widespread discussions about woman's rights into an organized woman's rights movement. Before Seneca Falls, people discussed woman's rights through abolitionism, legal reform, moral reform, temperance, or religion. Seneca Falls acted as a nucleating agent, turning those scattered debates ideas into a separate movement, distinct from its roots in other reforms. Only after Seneca Falls was there a recognizable woman's movement, with conventions, identifiable leaders, an agenda, and a plan of action.

Initially following reform paths forged principally by reform-minded Quaker abolitionists, woman's rights activists after Seneca Falls organized a local convention in Rochester, New York (1848); passed resolutions of support at meetings of Congregational Friends in Waterloo, New York, and Green Plain, Ohio (1849); organized a state convention in Salem, Ohio (1850); and then moved to national conventions, beginning at Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1850. Worcester initiated a pattern of annual national conventions held every year except 1857 until the Civil War, organized by a coalition that incorporated a core group of people who had attended the Seneca Falls convention (including Martha Wright, Lucretia Mott, Amy Post, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton), as well as Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, Paulina Wright Davis, and a rotating group of many others. These conventions encouraged woman's rights advocates to debate ideas (most of them introduced at Seneca Falls in the Declaration of Sentiments) in a focused forum, reach new audiences, and maintain a relatively fluid yet still effective level of organization, with minimum investment in formal structure and maximum outreach.

As the site of the first organized woman's rights convention, the Wesleyan Chapel is nationally important. The only other extant identifiable sites of pre-Civil War woman's rights

conventions are Cooper Union in New York City (site of the tenth national woman's rights convention in 1860) and Horticultural Hall in West Chester, Pennsylvania (site of the first state woman's rights convention held in Pennsylvania in 1852).⁴⁷⁹

Historians in the early twenty-first century began to look at Seneca Falls from a variety of perspectives, understanding that, as the first woman's rights convention and the beginning of the organized woman's rights movement, Seneca Falls was one step in an emerging woman's rights movement that had many sources and many authors. Around this one convention, historians began to discover a complex interweaving of threads, an intersecting of many relationships, and a wellspring of geographic, personal, political, and spiritual sources for woman's rights, with multiple layers of meaning. Historians also accepted themselves as actors, placing themselves in the matrix of time and place, understanding that their visions of history reflected their own place in the present as well as the situation of those they studied in the past.

⁴⁷⁹ Three sites relating to the Congregational Friends, supporters of the early woman's rights movement, also still stand: 1816 Farmington Quaker Meetinghouse, in Farmington, New York; Green Plain Meetinghouse in South Charleston, Ohio; and Longwood Meetinghouse in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania.